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Mark Twain's Theories of Morality.

Frank C. Flowers

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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MARK TWAIN'S THEORIES OF MORALITY

A dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

By

Frank C. Flowers

B. A., Louisiana College, 1930

B. A., Stanford University, 1932

M. A., Louisiana State University, 1939

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F. C. F.

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ABSTRACT

Two contradictory critical views have prompted this study. Van Wyck Brooks has developed the theory that Mark Twain's "despair" was the result of his philosophy; Bernard DeVoto fathers the idea that Mark Twain's philosophy was the result of his "despair." The first claims, in other words, that Clemens, a frustrated spirit, formulated a philosophy of life which soured his later years; the second claims that tragic occurrences in Mark Twain's life from 1890 to 1900 produced a bitterness in him which in turn called forth a pessimistic philosophy. Neither of these theories seems to take into very careful account the evidence about Mark Twain's "pessimism" which is available in the complete works.

The present study has three specific aims: first, to examine carefully the philosophical views advanced in What Is Man?; second, to determine how consistently the principles of this philosophy are introduced in Mark Twain's other works; third, to discover, if possible, within the works, a satisfactory solution to the problem of Mark Twain's "pessimism."

The first three chapters--"The Theory of Man," "The Theory of Education," and "The Theory of Energy"--are a detailed analysis of

Mark Twain's "gospel," What Is Man? Chapter one attempts to explain "man--the impersonal machine" in the sense apparently intended by Mark Twain. Chapter three is devoted to his belief in "personal merit." Chapter two, of special importance to this study, deals with Mark Twain's views on education. Here we see the system of training which Clemens outlined for the benefit of humankind. The inference is obvious: if Mark Twain believed man could train his ideals upward to an increasingly higher moral plane, if he formulated an educative program with that end in view, then the charges of "despair" and "pessimism" are without foundation. The evidence seems to support the thesis that the essay was intended as a treatise on human morals.

Chapters four and five, "The Theory of Society" and "The Theory of Religion," attempt to classify the caustic utterances of Mark Twain under the headings "social abuse" and "religious prejudice." A study of his writings makes it clear that pessimism, personal rage, and moral indignation are not identical terms.

Chapter six draws such conclusions about Mark Twain's "pessimism" as seem to be warranted by the analysis of his works in the light of his "gospel." First, Mark Twain was not a baffled pervert. Second, the Mark Twain who wrote Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn was not perceptibly different in philosophical outlook from the Mark Twain who wrote The Mysterious Stranger and What Is Man? Third, the moral didacticism of Mark Twain is present and consistent throughout the works, from the time of

The Innocents Abroad to the publication of The Mysterious Stranger.

Fourth, almost all the stories seem to exemplify the moral and philosophical principles contained in What Is Man?

INTRODUCTION

It is not the purpose of this study, in applying the term "philosopher" to Mark Twain, to argue that he was a profound thinker.¹ His own statement that complexities annoyed him forewarns the reader not to seek profundity in his work. But a man's ability to think is not necessarily measured by the depth of his thoughts. The thinking man, according to Mark Twain's express views upon the subject, is he who acts upon his own reasoned analysis of the problem facing him, as opposed to him who acts upon instinct, or "thought which walks in its sleep."² In this sense, Mark Twain was a thinker, an individualistic thinker, and even if he was not profound, his reasoned analysis of life and man make the word philosopher a not altogether inappropriate epithet.

Nor does this study lay claim to being the first to discover a philosopher in Mark Twain. Albert Bigelow Paine, the Clemens biographer, tells us that the discovery has been made quite frequently. "Every little while," he says, "during the forty years that have elapsed since

¹ Mark Twain's Works, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine, Stormfield edition, 37 vols. (New York: Harpers, 1929), XXXVII, 76. All subsequent references to Mark Twain's works, unless otherwise indicated, will be to this edition.

² Works, XXVI, 77.

then [i.e., since Mark Twain was first known as 'Moralist of the Main,']
 some one has come forward announcing him to be as much a philosopher
 as a humorist, as if this were a new discovery.³ And indeed, Paine,
 in suggesting the river as the source of much of Mark Twain's thought,
 gives us a clue as to the type of philosophy the reader may expect to
 find in his works. "Undoubtedly the river was a great school for the
 study of life's broader philosophies and humors: philosophies that
 avoid vague circumlocution and aim at direct and sure results. ..."⁴

Such popular, or folk philosophy, that is, philosophy without
 the traditional *trappings*, seems to make little appeal to scholars and
 critics; consequently, the product of Mark Twain's mental machinery,
 having been variously interpreted, is considered of negligible value.
 "For Mark Twain's philosophy," writes Richard D. Altick, "most readers
 quite properly care nothing; except for those occasional brilliant
 sentences one finds even in his worst work, it is desolate, uninspiring
 reading."⁵

Now, granting that only in a restricted sense can Mark Twain be
 called a philosopher, granting that his philosophy, when compared with
 the profound systems of thought expounded by the Greeks and their imi-
 tators, is wanting in certain qualities, still his views upon man hold

³
Works, XXX, 219.

⁴
Ibid., p. 128.

⁵
 Richard D. Altick, "Mark Twain's Despair," The South Atlantic Quarterly, (Oct., 1935), XXXIV, 366.

the interest of critics and readers--primarily, I think, because of the seeming discrepancy between the biographical interpretation of Clemens himself and the critical evaluation of his work. This discrepancy has its center in what is called Mark Twain's "pessimism," or Mark Twain's "despair," and so prominent have become the discussions of Mark Twain the pessimist, that the study of Mark Twain the humorist or Mark Twain the philosopher has been somewhat obscured. Within the past twenty years there has grown an ever-widening belief that Mark Twain was something quite different in his old age from what he was as a young man, that the Mark Twain who wrote The Mysterious Stranger (1898) was not the same Mark Twain who wrote Tom Sawyer (1875) and Huckleberry Finn (1876-83), and that this literary menopause became manifest about the time of A Connecticut Yankee (1886-89).

The explanations of Mark Twain's "pessimism" advanced by various critics have taken curious forms. There have been biological analyses, psychological or psychographical interpretations, Freudian autopsies, and sheer speculations. But the peculiarity of many of these explanations is that they have been hypothecated at too great a distance from Mark Twain's works and with too little regard for the facts available in the works. For example, frequent reference is made by critics to Mark Twain's "mechanistic philosophy" as it is expressed in the essay What Is Man? One sentence in the essay seems to have provoked most of the comment: "Man is a machine--an impersonal machine." This statement, taken out of context, is usually cited as a complete summary of Mark Twain's

philosophy and has become the basis of two leading schools of critical thought. One school has decided that Mark Twain's "despair" was the result of his philosophy; the other, that his philosophy was the result of his "despair."

But there is more to What Is Man? than this mechanical analogy. A careful reading of the essay makes this clear, that the author intended it as a moral treatise; and yet few critics in their analysis of What Is Man? have taken into account the Admonition of the Old Man which insists upon training one's ideals upward; seldom is there mention of the system which Mark Twain, in the guise of an old philosopher, outlined for this training. Practically one third of the essay is devoted to an educative plan which was expressly formulated in the hope that it would contribute to improving the human race, to bettering human morals, and much of his other work is prevailingly didactic. These facts have been lost sight of, but they must be considered if one is to reach a defensible estimate of Mark Twain and his place in American literature.

It is the purpose of this study, then, to present Mark Twain--Philosopher, in the belief that the best answer to those who charge him with extreme pessimism lies in his own philosophy of life, considered as a whole, not in fragments. If, as has been suggested, Mark Twain outlined a plan for the improvement of mankind, he must have believed human improvement possible. If he considered human improvement possible, he could not have been a thoroughgoing pessimist. And the evidence seems to support the thesis that Mark Twain's personal rage was not at all a

part of his philosophy--that his philosophy was in no way dependent upon his temper.

It is noteworthy that to his contemporaries and intimates Mark Twain was no great psychological problem. The men who knew him best, Howells, Twichell, Warner, and Paine, did not consider his caustic utterances upon the human race as indicative of a division of soul or a frustration of genius. Rather they considered him an artist who had made valuable contributions to the type of literature for which he was extremely well prepared. Paine says that "it was generally the smaller annoyances of life that made Mark Twain rage; the larger catastrophes⁶ were likely to stir only his philosophy." Does this not suggest that there is a distinction between personal rage and pessimism? Howells, in speaking of Clemens' use of the phrase "the damned human race," declares that "this was not an expression of impiety, but of the kind of contempt to which he was driven by our follies and iniquities as he had observed them in himself and others. It was as mild a misanthropy, possibly, as ever caressed the objects of its malediction."⁷ There is no indication that Howells considered the use of this phrase a sign of his friend's "despair," or an expression of his "pessimism," nor is there, in the summary Professor Brooks gives of the opinions about Mark Twain held by his contemporaries, any suggestion that they considered pessimism

⁶
Works, XXXV, 545.

⁷
W. D. Howells, My Mark Twain (New York: Harpers, 1910), p. 76.

a basic element in his philosophy. On the contrary, Mark Twain's contemporaries were able to sum up their opinions of him, both as a man and as an artist, without mentioning his pessimism:

...Mr. Howells called him the 'Lincoln of our literature,' Professor William Lyon Phelps describes him as one of the supreme novelists of the world, Professor Brander Matthews compared him with Cervantes, and Bernard Shaw said to him once: 'I am persuaded that the future historian of America will find your works as indispensable to him as a French historian finds the political tracts of Voltaire.' These were views current in Mark Twain's lifetime, and similar views are common enough today. 'Mark Twain,' says Professor Archibald Henderson, 'enjoys the unique distinction of exhibiting a progressive development, a deep and broadening of forces, a ripening of intellectual and spiritual powers from the beginning to the end.' To Mr. John Macy, author of what is, on the whole, the most discerning book that has been written on our literature, he is 'a powerful, original thinker.' And finally, Mr. H.L. Mencken says: 'Mark Twain, without question, was a great artist. There was in him something of that prodigality of imagination, that aloof engrossment in the human comedy, that penetrating cynicism, which one associates with the great artists of the Renaissance.' 8

To this summary might be added a few other testimonials. Professor Henderson observes further that "Mark Twain is serious enough to be regarded as a real moralist and philosopher, humane enough to be

regarded as, in spirit he was, a true sociologist and reformer.⁹ Rudyard Kipling wrote to F. N. Doubleday: "I love to think of the great and God-like Clemens. He is the biggest man you have on your side of the water by a damn sight, and don't you forget it. Cervantes was a relation of his."¹⁰ And in this survey of the opinion of Mark Twain's contemporaries concerning him, one should not overlook the remarks of C. Alphonso Smith,¹¹ which may be translated: "On the occasion of Mark Twain's death in 1910, the Berlin Zeitung (noon edition) stated that the American author was valued more than all the French and English humorists put together, for his humor was based upon a serious conception of life. If this were not true, the Mark Twain of today would carry no more weight in American literature than Artemus Ward, Petroleum V. Nasby, or Josh Billings. But while the others have dwindled to the place of mere fun-makers and jesters, Mark Twain is recognized as a literary landmark,¹² the 'middle-man,' [I suppose we could translate]

⁹
Archibald Henderson, Mark Twain (New York: Fred. A. Stokes, 1912), p. 179.

¹⁰
Letters, Works, XXXV, 746.

¹¹
C. Alphonso Smith, Die Amerikanische Literatur (Berlin: Weidmanische Buchhandlung, 1912), pp. 312-313.

¹²
Ibid., p. 336. "Grenzmann" is the appropriate word Smith applies. "Mark Twain war ein literarischer Grenzmann, weil er an der Grenslinie stand zwischen dem Individuum und der Institution. Für ihn war das Individuum das Werk der Natur, die Institution das Werk des Menschen. Die Institution war für den Menschen gemacht, nicht der Mensch für die Institution." Smith points out the prevalence of contrasts in the works of Mark Twain, "dramatic character contrasts in social position, contrasts of conservatism and radicalism, of nationalism and provincialism, of humor and pathos"; and it must be admitted that contrasts are a striking feature of the works. The balance which Mark Twain maintains in these contrasts is nothing short of remarkable. I shall call attention to specific instances of this as we proceed to a study of the essays and stories.

between the individual and the institution." And Clemens was conscious that he had won the place. In discussing the seventy-eight humorists who had place in Mark Twain's Library of Humor, an anthology edited by Howells, he observed:

Why have they perished? Because they were merely humorists. Humorists of the "mere" sort cannot survive. Humor is only a fragrance, a decoration. ...Humor must not professedly teach, and it must not profess-
edly preach, but it must do both if it would live forever. By forever, I mean thirty years. With all its preaching it is not likely to outlive so long a term as that. ... I have always preached. That is the reason I have lasted thirty years. If the humor came of its own accord and uninvited, I have allowed its place in my sermon for the sake of the humor. I should have written the sermon just the same, whether any humor applied for admission or not. ... 13

In contrast to these statements by Mark Twain's contemporaries and intimates are the theories which have appeared since 1920, the burden of whose song is that Mark Twain's condemnatory utterances and his "mechanistic philosophy" reveal in him a pessimist and a baffled pervert. Professor Brooks seems to have originated the theory that Clemens was intended to be something else than Clemens. "If anything is certain," he writes, "it is that Mark Twain was intended to become a sort of American Rabelais who would have done, as regards the puritanical commercialism of the Gilded Age, very much what the author of 'Pantagruel'

13

Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain in Eruption (New York: Harpers, 1940), pp. 202-203. The italics are mine.

did as regards the obsolescent mediaevalism of sixteenth-century
¹⁴ France."

Professor Pattee apparently subscribes to this view, for in his comment upon Mark Twain as satirist, he writes: "He accomplished nothing. Only a few, when the whole population is considered, ever read The Gilded Age, and these few read it not for its satire, they read it in spite of its satire. They wanted to laugh."¹⁵ Professor Cargill also calls into question the satirical accomplishments and the serious purpose of Clemens:

Hobnobbing with millionaires, dreaming of millions in type-setting machines and in publishing, Mark Twain never became a thorough convert to the movement, [the Social Revolt], whatever social protests his friends may find in his romances, The Prince and the Pauper, and A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. These stories are more specifically directed against the vogue of the mediaeval, established by Tennyson, Morris, and the pre-Raphaelites; and Twain's obvious delight in the reversals of fortune which they contain is typical of the spirit of the previous era.

16

And the same view is held by Parrington, who observes that "in part, no doubt--as Van Wyck Brooks has pointed out--the change from Mark Twain

¹⁴

Brooks, op. cit., p. 223.

¹⁵

F. L. Pattee, Mark Twain, American Writers Series (New York: American Book Co., 1935), p. xlvi.

¹⁶

Oscar Cargill, The Social Revolt (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p. 4.

the buoyant humorist of the seventies to the bitter pessimist of the nineties resulted from a thwarting of the creative artist by a disastrous surrender to the ideals of the Gilded Age."¹⁷

Perhaps we should examine more in detail the theses of Mr. Brooks that there is visible in Mark Twain "a steady progress toward a pessimistic cynicism,"¹⁸ and that he should have become a Rabelais or a Swift, but did not. The author of The Ordeal has suggested that Sam's mother, his wife, and his friend Howells were "frustrating" elements in his life, that they repressed him, edited him, and kept him from becoming an artist.¹⁹ It might be noted here that Bernard DeVoto and Max Eastman²⁰ have quite effectively answered this part of Mr. Brooks's thesis. In the light of their investigation, Mark Twain appears to have been quite free from repression, and especially does Mr. Eastman make out a case in defense of Olivia Langdon and the Elmira influence. He explains that the frequent remarks of Clemens that he would "catch it" from the wife are no more than marital jokes passed generally in American families, and that the Clemens household derived much fun from this alleged matriarchal domination.

¹⁷

V. L. Farrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), III, 89.

¹⁸

Brooks, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁹

Bernard DeVoto, "Mark Twain and the Genteel Tradition," The Harvard Graduate Magazine, (Dec., 1931), XL, 155-163.

²⁰

Max Eastman "Mark Twain's Elmira," Harpers (May, 1938), CLXXVI, 620-632.

But it is not at all clear what Mr. Brooks means by the statement that Mark Twain was a perverted artist. As we have seen, competent critics on both sides of the Atlantic had credited him with full artistic powers. We must understand what Professor Brooks means by his use of the word "artist." Here is a suggestion:

Little Sam was...a puny baby with a wavering promise of life. Mr. Paine speaks of him somewhere as 'high-strung and neurotic.' We are not surprised, therefore, to find him at three or four 'a wild-headed, impetuous child of sudden ecstasies that sent him capering and swinging his arms, venting his emotions in a series of leaps and shrieks and somersaults, and spasms of laughter as he lay rolling in the grass.' This is the child who is to retain through life that exquisite sensibility of which so many observers have spoken. 'Once...he had been sickened by the success of a gunner in bringing down a black-bird.' Already, in his infancy, his gentle, winning manner and smile made him everyone's favorite. A very special little flower of life, you see, capable of such feeling that at twenty-three his hair's to turn gray in the tragic experience of his brother's death. A flower of life, a wild flower, and infinitely fragile: The doctor is always being called in his behalf. Before he grows up he is to have prophetic dreams, ...he walks in his sleep...and is found 'fretting with cold in some dark corner.'

21

It is not at all clear what promise these qualities held--puny, high-strung and neurotic, wild-headed, ecstatic, somnambulistic, fragile, and flower-like; but it is to be inferred, I suppose, that had Mark Twain

not overcome these traits, he would have blossomed into the lily suggested in The Ordeal. But it is hard to see how Mark Twain could have become such an artist, and become at the same time an American Rabelais. However, the answer to such questions as these does not lie within the province of this investigation. Suffice it to say that the substance of what Mr. Brooks has to say is that Mark Twain's "despair" was the result of the pessimistic philosophy which he had constructed as a result of baffled artistic impulses.

Another theorist should be noted here, since he takes the opposite view from that offered by Professor Brooks. Mr. DeVoto has advanced the opinion that Mark Twain's pessimistic philosophy was the result of his despair; that the years from 1890 to 1900 were especially hard for Mark Twain: a series of disasters took away his own fortune and his wife's; he lost his daughter Susy, and later another daughter, Jean; he was forced to take to the lecture platform in order to recoup his lost fortune, and he intensely hated lecturing. Embittered by these and other experiences, Mr. DeVoto theorizes, Mark Twain developed a despair which he worked off in three books: The Autobiography, The Mysterious Stranger, and What Is Man? These three works Mr. DeVoto labels the "symbols of despair."²²

But, as has already been suggested, Mr. DeVoto's position seems no more tenable than that of Professor Brooks, for they have been

manufactured by critics who have not looked closely enough at Mark Twain's works to determine whether his philosophical outlook changed with the years or he simply became more outspoken in his views. Equally untenable are the merely speculative interpretations of Mark Twain. Richard D. Altick, in discussing Mark Twain's "despair," recognizes the mistakes made by other critics. "It is probable," he writes, "that during the past decade and a half critics have taken too great delight in imagining Mark Twain a prey to all sorts of psychological ills and an unhappy victim of repression."²³ And it seems that Mr. Altick tries to approximate a mean between the critical extremes: "Although critics disagree as to the actual amount of conscious satire in Mark Twain's earlier writings--his masterpieces--all are agreed, I think, that there is in them a 'deep strain of Swiftian bitterness.' ...The so-called 'ordeal' he went through was no 'frustration of his genius' and 'thwarting of his artistic instinct' excepting so far as a good deal of the intellectual and artistic potentialities he had were not developed."²⁴

But on the heels of this refutation of the psychological theorists, Mr. Altick proposes an explanation which is equally untenable, and for the same reason--namely, that it pays too little regard to the works. Here follows his solution: "Mark Twain's dilemma was the result of the failure of a dominant human trait he possessed to equip him for a normal

²³

Altick, op. cit., p. 359.

²⁴

Ibid., pp. 359-360.

human process."²⁵ That dominant trait, Mr. Altick goes on to explain, was his inability to grow old. This, I believe, is oversimplification, for "Mark Twain the pessimist" remains unexplained in terms of Mark Twain the philosopher.

In the following pages I propose to do three specific things: first, to examine carefully the philosophy of What Is Man?; second, to determine how consistently the principles of this philosophy are introduced in the other works; third, to discover, if possible, within the works, a satisfactory solution to the problem of Mark Twain's "pessimism." This study is based upon the conviction that Mark Twain the philosopher gave the best answer to the query "What is Mark Twain?" when he wrote his own answer to the question What Is Man?

25

Ibid., p. 362.

CHAPTER I

THE THEORY OF MAN

Any attempt at an analysis of Mark Twain the philosopher must take into very careful account the essay What Is Man?, for it is this work which Clemens was accustomed to call his "gospel." The essay takes the form of a Socratic dialogue. The Old Man, whom the reader has no trouble in identifying with Mark Twain, is engaged in the business of instructing the Young Man about the "human machine."

The "human machine"--a curious figure, certainly. This one phrase has caused much of the controversy about Mark Twain, and has inspired various interpretations and misinterpretations of his philosophy. Critics from time to time have had much to say about the word "human," or about the word "machine," each taken separately, but there seems to have been a general reluctance to treat the phrase as Mark Twain turned it. Van Wyck Brooks, for example, in his analysis of What Is Man? completely disregards the adjective "human," and spins his theory about what he labels "the mechanistic philosophy" of Mark Twain. Others have attempted analyses with emphasis on the word "human," and have undertaken to show, in one way or another, that in What Is Man? human relationships provoke only bitterness and despair. These critics fall short of the

truth, for they ignore the mechanistic element of the original figure, which, according to the Old Man, is a safeguard against bitterness and pessimism. It is necessary, however, to accept the phrase "human machine" as a unit and to consider both elements of the figure together in arriving at an understanding of Mark Twain's views on man.

Let us begin with a simple definition, taken from the essay.
 "Man is an impersonal machine."¹ The words seem to admit no compromise. The concreteness of the image--a machine which is controlled from the outside and can operate only under external direction--seems to degrade man to a level lower than human. If we take these words at their face value, the concept of the machine seems to deprive the adjective "human" of all its signification.

What, then, does Mark Twain mean by the definition, "man is an impersonal machine"? A clue to the answer lies in three rather general facts about the essay. First, the opening section of What Is Man? carries a double title--"a. Man the Machine. b. Personal Merit." Second, the words machine, engine, and the like, occur some sixty-two times in the essay; the phrase "personal merit" and the word "credit" appear thirty-three times. No particular importance can be attached to these numbers, but there is some significance in the order and arrangement of the words. The third fact which seems to give us a clue to Mark Twain's meaning is this: wherever the concept of the machine is used, it is followed by

¹
Works, XXVI, 5.

some statement about "personal merit," a doctrine which insists that since the machine is impersonal, since it operates according to the "law of its make," it deserves no credit for its performance. Do not these facts suggest that Mark Twain had something more in mind than what is usually termed a mechanistic philosophy? Indeed, it appears evident that the author's primary reason for using the metaphor of the machine was that he might prove his theory of personal merit. The Young Man recognizes his instructor's purpose, for he asks: "...In the process of 'working up to the matter' is it your idea to work up to the proposition that man and a machine are about the same thing, and that there is no personal merit in the performance of either?"² The Old Man agrees that his pupil has understood him correctly.

"Man and a machine are about the same thing." These words seem to qualify the original figure. Instead of presenting the machine for its own sake, as some critics have insisted, Mark Twain probably thought that he was giving it a definitely subordinate place in the scheme. If, then, the purely mechanical features take their intended place in the background, and if we accept the arguments for and against personal merit as the dominant note in the essay, our definition of man will ultimately hinge upon basic morality. But there is quite some distance between the extremes--man the impersonal machine, and man the moral agent. This distance must be compromised before we can accept What Is Man? as a moral

2

Ibid., p. 3. The italics are mine.

treatise instead of a mechanical analysis. And the compromise is not hard to find. The Young Man concedes the author's purpose, on condition:

Y. M. If we grant, for the sake of argument, that your scheme and the other schemes aim at and produce the same result--right living--has yours an advantage?

3

The end of the essay, then, is right living--a moral end. And what is the advantage of the Old Man's system? He replies:

Do right for your own sake.

Could there be any purer morality? Could this apply to the ordinary machine? And finally, the "Admonition" of the Old Man, which by every right is the focal point and summing up of the essay--this Admonition seems to establish the validity of the claim that What Is Man? was intended primarily as a moral treatise:

Diligently train your ideals upward and still upward toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and the community.

4

But even with such evidences as this supporting our moral theory, we still cannot escape the mechanical figure. It is still a part of the

3

Ibid., p. 56. The italics are mine.

4

Ibid., p. 54.

essay and must be recognized. Albert Bigelow Paine considers the two views irreconcilable.

Such [he says in his introduction to the essay] is the admonition, lofty human counsel, but in no wise to be comprehended in that absolute doctrine of an inevitable life sequence which has produced man, the machine. There can be no 'training the ideals upward and still upward,' no selfishness or unselfishness except the self-interest which is the natural law of evolution, within the boundaries of that conclusion. Once admitting that existence is merely a sequence of cause and effect, we have a theory that must stand or fall as a whole. 5

It is obvious at this point that our first problem in arriving at anything conclusive concerning Mark Twain's views on man is to discover some means of reconciling the two seemingly contradictory theses of the essay. It is a roundabout process.

It seems to me that the most difficult problem in that almost impossible task--the task of defining man--is the selection of words that will faithfully convey to the reader the thought as it is originally conceived in the mind of the writer. The task is rendered even more difficult when the writer has to use for his definition such words as soul, conscience, mind, temperament, and spirit. The privilege that many psychologists have assumed in appropriating for their own use the terms of philosophic nomenclature has added to the variety of meanings these words

may have. But the danger of ambiguity has always been a problem to thinkers. Perhaps this is the reason that oriental teachers and philosophers found the parable best suited to their utterances dealing with existence, human and divine. The parable allows certain freedom to the imagination which concrete words wholly deny and which abstractions entirely abuse.

One cannot read far into What Is Man? without becoming aware that, in his definition of man, Mark Twain faced verbal difficulties. Perhaps they were unconscious difficulties, for he was accustomed to say about his philosophy that it was like the sky--"one could not break through it anywhere." But though his may be an irrefragable philosophy, there is, as I have indicated, some question about the words with which he clothed it. Paul Carus, editor of the scientific and philosophical journal Monist, has expressed just such an opinion: "Mark Twain's philosophy is true as to facts, but his attitude is wrong, and the source of his error lies in the mistaken mythology in which he dresses his psychological nomenclature."⁶

To the minds of Albert Bigelow Paine and Paul Carus, then, it appeared that Mark Twain's philosophy was predicated upon two irreconcilable views. But there is, I believe, a linking element between the two extremes, an element which has not received the attention that has been given the extremes themselves. Mark Twain conceived of a "machine"

⁶
Paul Carus, "Mark Twain's Philosophy," Monist (April, 1913), XXIII, 188.

that could "train its ideals upward"--a machine of peculiar sort, to be sure. And though one may lament his choice of words and image, yet, in justice, is it not necessary to think of the machine of his definition, rather than of some other? The Old Man, a teacher speaking to his pupil, found the parable best suited to his task; he based his elementals upon a figure of easy acceptance and of sufficient accuracy to serve his purpose. That figure is the human machine. To understand Mark Twain's use of the figure, perhaps a word is necessary as to one possible source of its conception.

Paine tells us that as early as 1874 Mark Twain was impressed by William Lecky's The History of European Morals.

7

There were periods when they read Lecky avidly and discussed it in original and unorthodox ways. Mark Twain found an echo of his own philosophies in Lecky. He made frequent marginal notes along the pages of the world's moral history--notes not always quotable in the family circle. ...In one place Lecky refers to those who have undertaken to prove that all our morality is a product of experience, holding that a desire to obtain happiness and to avoid pain is the only possible motive to action; the reason, and the only reason, why we should perform virtuous actions being 'that on the whole such a course will bring us the greatest amount of happiness.' Clemens has endorsed these philosophies by writing in the margin, 'Sound and true.'

8

7

Clemens and Theodore Crane. Crane was Mark Twain's brother-in-law.

8

Works, XXXI, 511.

The influence of Lecky becomes more apparent when we read his discussion of conscience and virtue and draw parallels between them and the teachings of the philosopher in What Is Man? For example, in Lecky we read:

Conscience, whether we regard it as an original faculty, or as a product of the association of ideas, exercises two distinct functions. It points out a difference between right and wrong, and when its commands are violated, it inflicts a certain measure of suffering and disturbance. The first function it exercises persistently through life. The second it only exercises under certain special circumstances. ... Self interest is the one ultimate reason for virtue, however much the moral chemistry of Hartley may disguise and transform it. Ought or ought not means nothing more than the prospect of acquiring or of losing pleasure. 9

It is not the purpose of this study to determine the influence of Lecky on Mark Twain, though the frequent parallels lead me to believe that such a study would be fruitful. Miss Minnie Brashear has touched upon the subject slightly, though she makes no attempt at a detailed investigation.¹⁰ But mention of Lecky's History is made here for two reasons: first, because the book apparently contributed to Mark Twain's philosophy; and second, because the marginal annotations which Mark Twain made in his copy indicate the early date at which he gave thought to human morals.

9

William Edward Hartpole Lecky, The History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne (New York: D. Appleton, 1869) I, 64;66.

10

Minnie Brashear, Mark Twain, Son of Missouri (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), pp. 243-249.

A better comprehension of Mark Twain's "Man" will follow, I believe, if we look at his views in the following order: first, man, the machine; second, the machine qualified; third, the machine at work.

Man, the Machine

We know, then, that as early as 1874, Mark Twain was impressed by Lecky's theory that all morality is the product of experience. "As time went on," continues Paine, "he developed, or adopted, a second conclusion--that man is no more than an irresponsible machine." ¹¹ It is easy to understand Clemens' use of the figure. Machinery fascinated him. In 1880 he had interested himself in the Paige typesetting machine, which was to disappoint him, almost as much as the human machine, in his hopes for perfection. And that he did believe in the perfectibility of man, the letter which he wrote to Joseph T. Goodman in October, 1889, bears witness:

The machine was finished several weeks ago, and has been running ever since in the machine shop. It is a magnificent creature of steel, all of Pratt and Whitney's superbest workmanship, and as nicely adjusted as a watch. In construction it is as elaborate and complex as that machine which it ranks next to, by every right--man--and in performance it is as simple and sure.

12

11

Works, XXVI, x.

12

Letters, II, 516.

Notice here that man is ranked as the superlative machine. This is a fact that many seem to forget when they harp continuously upon Mark Twain's "habit of damning" the human race. Mark Twain contemned human morals, but was ever a believer in the potentialities of the human machine, just as, in spite of the failure that wrecked his fortune, he continued to believe that the Paige typesetter was potentially great. But let us look into the parable itself in order to get a fuller statement about this human machine:

- O. M. ...man the machine--man the im-
personal engine. Whatsoever a man is,
is due to his make, and to the influences
brought to bear upon it by his heredities,
his habitat, his associations. He is
moved, directed, COMMANDED, by exterior
influences--solely. He originates nothing,
not even a thought.
- Y. M. Oh, come! Where do I get my opinion
that this which you are talking is all
foolishness?
- O. M. It is a quite natural opinion--indeed--
an inevitable opinion--but you did not cre-
ate the materials out of which it is formed.
They are odds and ends of thought, impres-
sions, feelings, gathered unconsciously from
a thousand books, a thousand conversations,
and from streams of thought and feeling which
have flowed down into your heart and brain
out of the hearts and brains of centuries of
ancestors. Personally, you did not create
even the smallest microscopic fragment of the
materials out of which your opinion is made;
and personally you cannot claim even the
slender merit of putting the borrowed materials
together. That was done automatically--by your
mental machinery, in strict accordance with the
law of that machinery's construction. And you

not only did not make that machinery
yourself, but you have not even any com-
mand over it.

13

One may look in vain through the essay to find any more about a mere machine than is contained in the foregoing citation. Henceforward, the machine assumes such functions as are impossible to any ordinary mechanism.

The discussion up to this point has considered only about one third of the first thirteen pages in the essay. The other two thirds discusses the training of the machine, which is irrelevant at this point. But notice, even in this brief survey, the subordination of the purely mechanistic element to Lecky's theory of morals. "Whatsoever man is, is due to his make, and the influences brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations."

The Machine Qualified

The Young Man, in disgust at the ideas which deprive him of personal merit, hypothecates the instance of a timid man who set himself the task of conquering his cowardice and becoming brave--and succeeded. Is there not some personal merit in the victorious coward's project and achievement?¹⁴ The Old Man explains that some outside influence prompted the action, possibly a sweetheart, who "turned up her nose" at his cowardice. The Young Man then cries out:

¹³

Works, XXVI, 5.

¹⁴

Ibid., p. 9.

Y. M. Hang it, where is the sense in his becoming brave if he is to get no credit for it?

O. M. Your question will answer itself presently. It involves an important detail of man's make which we have not yet touched upon.

15

Now this detail is the link between the two seemingly contradictory theories in Mark Twain's philosophy--the generally disregarded link which differentiates the man-machine from the ordinary machine. The conversation continues:

Y. M. What detail is that?

O. M. The impulse which moves a person to do things--the only impulse that ever moves a person to do a thing.

Y. M. The only one! Is there but one?

O. M. That is all. There is only one.

Y. M. Well, certainly that is a strange enough doctrine. What is the sole impulse that ever moves a person to do a thing?

O. M. The impulse to content his own spirit--the necessity of contenting his own spirit and winning its approval.

16

Quite obviously, Mark Twain has left behind him the simple figure of a mere mechanical device. Here is the human machine, with its one

 15

Ibid., p. 11. The italics are mine.

16

Ibid., pp. 11-12.

moving impulse, the "elaborate and complex machine--man" of which he had spoken in the letter to Goodman. He began with a figure of speech, possibly an unfortunate figure, but as soon as it failed to serve his purpose, he abandoned it. The trick is characteristic of Mark Twain. For example, in commenting upon the freedom with which he had handled geography in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, he remarked that he would move a state if the exigencies of literature demanded it.¹⁷ It is understandable, therefore, that he found nothing inconsistent in equipping his machine with a motivating impulse, and with an internal spirit which had to be contented. The reader must accept this "convention" if he is to follow the thoughts of the philosopher, for presently the Old Man clarifies his position:

O. M. To me, man is a machine, made up of many mechanisms, the moral and mental ones acting automatically in accordance with the impulses of an interior Master who is built out of born-temperament and an accumulation of multitudinous outside influences and trainings; a machine whose one function is to secure the spiritual contentment of the Master, be his desires good or be they evil; a machine whose will is absolute and must be obeyed and always is obeyed.

18

We have, according to the definition of Mark Twain himself, a machine with an interior Master, a moving impulse. But the qualification

 17

Autobiography, Works, XXXVI, 96.

18

Works, XXVI, 98.

is not yet complete. In The Mysterious Stranger, a later work than What Is Man?, we find a further qualification of the machine figure. Satan, nephew to the Miltonic hero, is speaking to young Theodor Fischer, son of the church organist in the sleepy Austrian town of Eseldorf:

...You belong to a singular race. Every man is a suffering-machine and a happiness-machine combined. The two functions work together harmoniously, with a fine and delicate precision, on the give-and-take principle. For every happiness turned out in the one department the other stands ready to modify it with a sorrow or a pain--maybe a dozen. In most cases the man's life is about equally divided between happiness and unhappiness. When this is not the case the unhappiness predominates--always; never the other. Sometimes a man's make and disposition are such that his misery-machine is able to do nearly all the business. Such a man goes through life almost ignorant of what happiness is. Everything he touches, everything he does, brings a misfortune upon him. You have seen such people. To that kind of a person life is not an advantage, is it? It is only a disaster. Sometimes for an hour's happiness a man's machinery makes him pay years of misery.

19

Let us recapitulate. Up to this point, "man is a machine made up of many mechanisms, the moral and mental ones acting automatically," and "man is a suffering-machine and a happiness-machine combined." The Young Man has difficulty in following. He remonstrates:

Y. M. You keep me confused and perplexed all the time by your elusive terminology.

Sometimes you divide a man up into two or three separate personalities, each with authorities, jurisdictions, and responsibilities of its own, and when he is in that condition I can't grasp him. Now when I speak of a man, he is the whole thing in one, and easy to hold and contemplate.

O. M. That is pleasant and convenient, if true. When you speak of "my body" who is the "my"?

Y. M. It is the "me."

O. M. The body is property, then, and the Me owns it. Who is the Me?

Y. M. The Me is the whole thing; it is a common property; an undivided ownership, vested in the whole entity.

O. M. If the Me admires a rainbow, is it the whole Me that admires it, including the hair, hands, heels, and all?

Y. M. Certainly not. It is my mind that admires it.

O. M. So you divide the Me yourself. Everybody does; everybody must. What then definitely is the Me?

Y. M. I think it must consist of just those two parts--the body and the mind.

O. M. You think so? If you say "I believe the world is round," who is the "I" that is speaking?

Y. M. The mind.

O. M. If you say "I grieve for the loss of my father," who is the "I"?

Y. M. The mind.

O. M. Is the mind exercising an intellectual function when it examines and accepts the evidence that the world is round?

Y. M. Yes.

O. M. Is it exercising an intellectual function when it grieves for the loss of your father?

Y. M. No. That is not cerebation, brain work, it is a matter of feeling.

O. M. Then its source is not in your mind, but in your moral territory?

Y. M. I have to grant it.

O. M. Is your mind a part of your physical equipment?

Y. M. No. It is independent of it; it is spiritual.

O. M. Being spiritual, it cannot be affected by physical influences?

Y. M. No. ...

O. M. But isn't spiritual enough to learn what is happening in the outskirts without the help of the physical messenger? You perceive that the question of who or what the Me is, is not a simple one at all. ... You say the mind is wholly spiritual; then you say "I have a pain" and find this time the Me is mental and spiritual combined. We all use the "I" in this indeterminate fashion, there is no help for it. We imagine a Master and King over what you call The Whole Thing, and we speak of him as "I", but when we try to define him we find we cannot do it. ...

20

Our simple machine has become now, through this process of qualification, a complexity of mechanisms which may be classified as physical, mental, and moral, each capable of working separately, or of

combining its efforts with one of the other two, all under the governance of the internal motivating force, the Master Passion. It will be necessary to say something here about this inner force before we come to our third section, the machine at work.

Let us go back to that part of the essay in which we found the link between the seemingly contradictory views of man the machine, and man the moral agent. The reconciling feature, I have suggested--the one mark of distinction which takes Mark Twain's man-machine out of the class of the ordinary--is the "impulse to content his own spirit." The Old Man does not throw this in as merely an incidental feature; the Law of the Sole Impulse is the major premise upon which his entire philosophy is based. Here is that law:

From his cradle to his grave a man never does a single thing which has any FIRST AND FOREMOST object but one--to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort for HIMSELF. ...

21

Y. M. Apparently, then, all men, both good and bad ones, devote their lives to contenting their consciences.

O. M. Yes. That is a good enough name for it: conscience--that insolent, absolute Monarch inside of a man who is the Man's Master.

22

Note that the conscience is not a "still, small voice" which directs a man to that which is good. It is the Sole Impulse, a whimsical

 21

Ibid., p. 15.

22

Ibid., pp. 20-21.

monarch which has no concern with right or wrong. It is not an inher-
²³
 itance of the individual, but is acquired; the conscience does not
 direct what is to be done--it merely approves or disapproves what is
 done. "As a guide or incentive to any authoritatively prescribed line
 of morals or conduct (leaving training out of account), a man's con-
²⁴
 science is totally valueless." But, the conscience may be trained to
 prefer certain morals and conduct. I shall discuss fully the training
 process in another place. I call attention to the fact here merely in
 order to make feasible the application of the admonition--to train "the
 ideals upward and still upward." The conscience, finally, is

O. M. ...that mysterious autocrat, lodged
 in a man, which compels the man to con-
 tent its desires. It may be called the
 Master Passion--the hunger for self-
 approval.

Y. M. Where is its seat?

O. M. In man's moral constitution.

Y. M. Are its commands for a man's good?

O. M. It is indifferent to the man's good;
 it never concerns itself about anything
 but the satisfying of its own desires.
 It can be trained to prefer them only be-
 cause they will content it better than
 other things would. ...In all cases it
 seeks a spiritual contentment, let the
 means be what they may. Its desires are

²³

Ibid., p. 21

²⁴

Ibid.

determined by the man's temperament--and it is lord over that. Temperament, Conscience, Susceptibility, spiritual appetite, are in fact the same thing.

25

The last two sentences present verbal difficulties. Conscience is lord over temperament; yet "temperament, conscience...are, in fact, the same thing." Possibly Homer nodded here, for elsewhere in the essay, as we shall presently see, temperament and conscience are not, in fact, "the same thing." But be that as it may, our completely qualified machine would appear to be somewhat as follows: Man is a peculiar kind of machine, composed of at least three separate mechanisms, all under the control of a Master Passion, which has its seat in the moral constitution. This Master Passion must be satisfied. We shall now proceed to an examination of the separate mechanisms.

The Machine at Work: Physical

We do not expect to find in a moral treatise or philosophical discourse a great deal of space devoted to the purely physical. In our survey of What Is Man? up to this point, we have had only one reference to the body, and we have learned that it is the property of the whole me--that part of the me which serves to house the mental and moral me. But it is not easy, as the Young Man discovers, to define the parts separately. We might begin with the matter out of which the machine is made,

but note that the Old Man cannot develop his thesis far without encroaching upon moral territory:

O. M. What are the materials out of which a steam engine is made?

Y. M. Iron, steel, brass, white-metal, and so on.

O. M. Where are these found?

Y. M. In the rocks.

O. M. In a pure state?

Y. M. No--in ores.

O. M. Are the metals suddenly deposited in the ores?

Y. M. No--it is the patient work of countless ages.

O. M. You could make the engine out of the rocks themselves?

Y. M. Yes, a brittle one and not valuable.

O. M. You would not require much of such an engine as that?

Y. M. No--substantially nothing.

O. M. To make a fine and capable engine, how would you proceed?

Y. M. Drive tunnels and shafts into the hills; blast out the iron ore; crush it, smelt it, reduce it to pig-iron; put some of it through the Bessemer process and make steel of it. Mine and treat and combine the several metals of which brass is made.

O. M. Then?

Y. M. Out of the perfected result, build the fine engine.

O. M. You would require much of this one?

Y. M. Oh, indeed yes.

O. M. It could drive lathes, drills, planers, punchers, polishers, in a word all the cunning machines of a great factory?

Y. M. It could.

O. M. What could the stone engine do?

Y. M. Drive a sewing-machine, possibly--nothing more, perhaps.

O. M. Men would admire the other engine and rapturously praise it?

Y. M. Yes.

O. M. But not the stone one?

Y. M. No.

O. M. The merits of the metal machine would be far above those of the stone one?

Y. M. Of course.

O. M. Personal merits?

Y. M. Personal merits. How do you mean?

O. M. It would be personally entitled to the credit of its own performance?

Y. M. The engine? Certainly not.

O. M. Why not?

Y. M. Because its performance is not personal. It is a result of the law of its construction. It is not a merit that it does the things which it is set to do--it can't help doing them.

26

What Is Man? opens with this dialogue. It is quite evident that the speakers do not proceed far until they get into a moral discussion, but from the conversation we do get a hint as to the nature of physical man. I have pointed out already that the Old Man, in his definition of the Master Passion, declares that the Conscience is lord over temperament. We may note here that Mark Twain designates temperament as part of the physical equipment, i.e., those qualities the individual is born with, or, more properly in keeping with the figure of the machine, the material out of which the machine is made. According to our philosopher,²⁷ "there are tin men, gold men, leaden men, copper men, and steel men"; these metals are not pure to begin with, but must be refined through various processes, and nothing can change the basic metal. This is the one physical law which Mark Twain postulates, namely, that tin men cannot²⁸ become gold. A tin man may become refined up to the limits prescribed by his basic metal; a leaden man may reach the perfection to be expected of a leaden man, and so on. Each is subject to the law of his make.

The Machine at Work: Mental

As the physical man is ruled by law, so is the mental, or spiritual. Here are the terms of the spirit: The mind "has no command over²⁹ itself, its owner has no command over it."

²⁷

Ibid., p. 4.

²⁸

Ibid.

²⁹

Ibid., p. 7.

- O. M. It is diligently at work, unceasingly at work, during every waking moment. Have you never tossed about all night, imploring, beseeching, commanding your mind to stop work and let you go to sleep? ... When it chooses to work, there is no way to keep it still for an instant. The brightest man would not be able to supply it with subjects if he had to hunt them up. If it needed the man's help it would wait for him to give it work when he wakes in the morning. ... He may go to sleep saying, "the moment I wake I will think upon such and such a subject," but he will fail. His mind will be too quick for him; by the time he has become nearly enough awake to be half conscious, he will find that it is already at work upon another subject. Make the experiment and see.
- Y. M. At any rate, he can make it stick to a subject if he wants to.
- O. M. Not if it finds another that suits it better. As a rule it will listen to neither a dull speaker nor a bright one. It refuses all persuasion. The dull speaker wearies it and sends it far away in idle dreams; the bright speaker throws out stimulating ideas which it goes chasing after, and is at once unconscious of him and his talk. ³⁰ You cannot keep your mind from wandering, if it wants to; it is master, not you. ³¹

It will be remembered that the popular story "Punch, Brother, Punch" was built upon this theory of the mind's inability to control itself. Interestingly enough, the date of the story is late '78 or early '79. Hence, it seems safe to infer that this theory of the machine-like

30

Cf. the statement of Hawthorne in "Sunday at Home."

31

Works, XXVI, 63-64.

operation of the mind does not belong peculiarly to the "pessimism" of Mark Twain's declining years. The Old Man continues his instruction and explains the thinking process.

O. M. ...Men perceive, and their brain-machines automatically combine the things perceived. That is all.

Y. M. The steam engine?

O. M. It takes fifty men a hundred years to invent it. One meaning of invent is discover. I use the word in that sense. Little by little they discover and apply the multitude of details that go to make the perfect engine. Watt noticed that confined steam was strong enough to lift the lid of the teapot. He didn't create the idea, he merely discovered the fact; the cat had noticed it a hundred times. From the teapot he evolved the cylinder--from the displaced lid he evolved the piston-rod. ...One by one, improvements were discovered by men who used their eyes, not their creating powers--for they hadn't any--and now, after a hundred years the patient contributions of fifty or a hundred observers stand compacted in the wonderful machine which drives the ocean liner.

32

This is the exact parallel which Mark Twain established for his human machine. Perfection in mechanics or in mental operation is cumulative, not creative. But now, if we accept this description of the thinking process, we shall have no trouble accepting Mark Twain's definition

32

Ibid., p. 72.

33

This thought will be developed in Chapter II.

of thought: "the mechanical and automatic putting together of impressions received from outside, and drawing an inference from them." ³⁴ Note that this is precisely what Mark Twain calls in another place "unconscious plagiarism." It is the principle underlying the composition of a play by Shakespeare ³⁵ or a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes. ³⁶ At this point the Young Man objects:

The first man had original thought,
anyway; there was nobody to draw from.

O. M. It is a mistake. Adam's thoughts came to him from the outside. You have a fear of death. You did not invent that--but you got it from the outside, from talking and teaching. Adam had no fear of death--none in the world.

Y. M. Yes he had.

O. M. When he was created?

Y. M. No.

O. M. When, then?

Y. M. When he was threatened with it.

O. M. Then it came from the outside. ...None but gods ever have a thought which did not come from the outside.

37

34

Ibid., p. 77.

35

Ibid., p. 73.

36

Autobiography, Works, XXXVI, 240-241.

37

What Is Man?, p. 7.

There remains one feature of the mental mechanism to be discussed. We have learned that the operation of the mind is automatic and cannot be controlled by its owner. We have observed the thinking process and have arrived at a definition of thought. Up to the present we are to assume that thought, or the process of thinking, goes forward on something of a straight line, that is, when the mind has to deal only with a simple problem. But suppose the mind faces a complexity. What is the working of the mind in a complex situation?

In the lower orders, both of animals and of human kind, the individual will depend upon "instinct" to extricate himself from the situation; but Mark Twain doubts that instinct is a safe guide. "Instinct," he remarks, "is petrified thought--thought which was once wide awake, but is become unconscious--walks in its sleep, so to speak."³⁸ What we call "instinctive action" is, then, no more than "habitual action," and is not necessarily the right action. It served the first man, the man to whom the thought was originally suggested, but it has become restrictive in its every aspect. Here, I believe, is the source of Mark Twain's most bitter attacks upon the human race, whose members act, not because they have thought the situation out, but because they act upon the solidified thought which has become habit or instinct.

But those who think, those whose experiences require solutions not to be reached through instinctive action--how do those machines

38

Ibid., p. 77.

operate? The answer involves a discussion of free will. I have spoken of the Master Passion and the necessity of satisfying it. A man who is about to board a street car is confronted by a poor old woman. The snow is deep--the wind is raw and chill. The man has twenty-five cents in his pocket--the exact amount of the fare to his home three miles away. He gives the quarter to the old woman. Why? To please his Master Spirit, first; to help the old woman, next.

In the first place he couldn't bear the pain which the suffering old face gave him. So he was thinking of his pain--this good man. ...If he did not succor the old woman his conscience would torture him all the way home. ...If he didn't relieve the old woman he wouldn't get any sleep. ...Thus, to sum up, he bought himself free of a sharp pain in his heart, he bought himself free of the tortures of a waiting conscience, he bought a whole night's sleep--all for twenty-five cents!

39

But we wonder--was it Free Will which dictated the man's action?

The Old Man thinks not:

O. M. We are constantly assured that every man is endowed with Free Will, and that he can and must exercise it where he is offered a choice between good conduct and less-good conduct. Yet we clearly saw that in that Man's case he really had no Free Will: his temperament, his training, and the daily influences which had molded him and made him what he was, compelled him

to rescue the old woman and thus save himself--save himself from the spiritual pain, from unendurable wretchedness. He did not make the choice, it was made for him by forces which he could not control. Free will has always existed in words, but it stops there, I think--stops short of fact. I would not use those words, Free Will--but others.

Y. M. What others?

O. M. Free Choice.

Y. M. What is the difference?

O. M. The one implies untrammelled power to act as you please, the other implies nothing beyond a mere mental process: the critical ability to determine which of two things is nearest right and just. ... The mind can freely select, choose, point out the right and just one--its function stops there. It can go no further in the matter. It has no authority to say that the right one shall be acted upon and the wrong one discarded. That authority is in other hands.

40

Obviously, the other authority spoken of is the moral mechanism, the third division of the human machine. But before we enter into this discussion, let us glance again at the salient features of the mental processes. First, the mind functions automatically; second, it functions to produce thought only when prompted by outside influences; third, thought is cumulative, not creative; fourth, the mental process may criticize and determine which of two things is nearest right, but it has no authority to act.

The Machine at Work: Moral

We must keep in mind constantly that the determining factor, not only of the moral mechanism, but also of the whole man, is the Master Passion, which the Old Man identifies with the conscience. Its pleasure is the Sole Impulse which moves our machine to action. The law of the Sole Impulse, as has been stated, demands that the spirit, or passion, or conscience be contented. But we have discovered also that this force is not a guide or director--not the still small voice which always prompts to the good. The mental mechanism is the judge, the critic of right and wrong; whereas the conscience, we learn in one place, "is a colorless force seated in the man's moral constitution. Let us call it an instinct--a blind, unreasoning instinct, which cannot and does not distinguish between good morals and bad ones, and cares nothing for results to the man provided its own contentment be secured; and it will always secure that."⁴¹ And in another place we are told that "there are all kinds of consciences because there are all kinds of men. You satisfy an assassin's conscience in one way, a philanthropist's in another, a miser's in another, a burglar's in still another."⁴²

Now the purpose of this line of reasoning is to work up to the proposition that self-sacrifice in the usual sense is non-existent. See

⁴¹

Ibid., p. 99.

⁴²

Ibid., p. 21.

how this fits into the scheme. If Mark Twain can deflate the theory of self-sacrifice, if he can prove that all action is the attempt of a spirit to satisfy itself, he will do away with much of the superficiality and sham existing in the world. A man will not vaunt or pride himself upon having committed an act of love or philanthropy because of a genuine urge to self-sacrifice, but will admit that the act was necessary to satisfy his inner spirit.⁴³ Many examples discounting apparent self-sacrifice appear in What Is Man? The Old Man is quite convincing. For example:

Love is that impulse in its most uncompromising form. It will squander life and everything else on its object. Not primarily for the object's sake, but for its own. When its object is happy it is happy--and that is what it is unconsciously after.

Mother-love even, that lofty and gracious passion, is no exception. It is the absolute slave of that law. The mother will go naked to clothe her child; she will starve that it may have food; suffer torture to save it from pain; die that it might live. She takes a living pleasure in making these sacrifices. She does it for that reward--that self-approval, that contentment, that peace, that comfort. She would do it for your child, IF SHE COULD GET THE SAME PAY.

44

Take that noble passion, love of country, patriotism. A man who loves peace and dreads

 43

Notice how this parallels Lecky's comment on virtue.

44

Ibid., p. 19.

pain, leaves his pleasant home and his weeping family and marches out manfully to expose himself to hunger, cold, wounds, and death. ...Perhaps there is something that he loves more than he loves peace--the approval of his neighbors and the public. And perhaps there is something which he dreads more than he dreads pain--the disapproval of his neighbors and the public. If he is sensitive to shame he will go to the field--not because his spirit will be entirely comfortable there, but because it will be more comfortable there than it would be if he remained at home. 45

The working of the law of the conscience, then, is the operation of the law of the self. In doing away with self-sacrifice, the Old Man does away with all personal merit accruing from any alleged instance of self-sacrifice. The principle is not new; it is not peculiar to this philosophical system. The Old Man alludes to the Galilean admonition, the second great commandment--"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The only difference between the Biblical scheme and the Old Man's is the arrangement of the words; the sense is identical, regardless of the rhetorical placement of the self and the neighbor.

The advantages of the system become more and more apparent as we understand the workings of the various mechanisms and the reasons why they work as they do. The end, as the Old Man states it, and as the Young Man agrees, is right living. What, specifically, can be the advantage of this system?

O. M. It has no concealments, no deceptions. When a man leads a right and valuable life under it he is not deceived as to the real chief motive which impels him to it. ... 46

Y. M. It is my opinion that under your scheme of a man's doing a good deed for his own sake first-off, instead of first for the good deed's sake, no man will ever do one. 47

O. M. I claim to know that when a man is a shade more strongly moved to do one of two things or of two dozen things than he is to do one of the others, he will infallibly do that one thing, be it good or be it evil; and if it be good, not all the beguilements of all the casuistries can increase the strength of the impulse by a single shade or add a shade to the comfort and contentment he will get out of the act.

Y. M. Then you believe that such tendency toward doing good as is in men's hearts would not be diminished by the removal of the delusion that good deeds are done primarily for the sake of No. 1 instead of for the sake of No. 2?

O. M. That is what I fully believe.

Y. M. Doesn't it somehow seem to take away from the dignity of the deed?

O. M. If there is dignity in falsity, it does. It removes that.

Y. M. What is left for the moralist to do?

O. M. Teach unreservedly what he already teaches with one side of his mouth and

46

Ibid., p. 56.

47

Ibid., p. 57.

takes back with the other: Do right for your own sake, and be happy in knowing that your neighbor will certainly share in the benefits resulting.

Y. M. Repeat your admonition.

O. M. Diligently train your ideals upward and still upward toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and the community.

48

Where have we arrived? Back at our starting point, where the evidence seemed to corroborate the suggestion that the essay What Is Man? was intended primarily as a moral treatise, and that the machine figure is no more than a parable upon which the author hangs certain of his teachings. Let me summarize then, not in terms of the subordinate figure, but in terms of the moral system at which we ultimately arrive: Man may be divided into three mechanisms. The "physical man" includes his temperament,--his innate disposition,--and his desires are determined thereby. The "mental man" is the critical, judicial part, which has Free Choice in matters, but has no power to act. The "moral man" is the Master Passion of the whole "Me," the internal spirit which must in all cases be satisfied. We shall see presently that the physical man may learn to desire better things; that the mental man may sharpen his critical judgement; and that the moral man may require better and better things for the contentment of his Spirit. This is the training process outlined in

What Is Man? It is important in Mark Twain's philosophy of life. He was accustomed to saying repeatedly, "Training is everything." We are not surprised at this now, for we understand his use of the phrase the "human machine."

CHAPTER II

THE THEORY OF EDUCATION

We are not to suppose that it was only in the closing years of his life that Mark Twain turned his mind to a consideration of training the machine. Just as we observed in the preceding chapter that he had pretty definitely worked out his theory of man before the appearance of What Is Man?, so, too, it is evident that there is not a single educational idea developed in What Is Man? which had not appeared earlier in some one of his books. Those who insist that Mark Twain's pessimism was a development in the closing years of his life seem to take little account of the plans which he formulated for the improvement of the race. If he worked for human improvement, he must have believed improvement possible; hence, he could not have been a thoroughgoing pessimist.

One of the most substantial proofs that Mark Twain's theory of man is based upon the assumption of moral progress is the fact that he devoted so much of his thought and writing to education. "Training is everything" expresses an idea which occurs repeatedly in his works. It is a maxim in Pudd'nhead's Calendar, (1892). Wilson repeats it several times in the course of his dealing with Driscoll and Valet. The Connecticut Yankee, Sir Boss, uses it over and over again--he builds his

government upon the principle of moral improvement through training (1886-80). We find it, too, in The Prince and the Pauper (1877-80), and if not the exact words, we find at least the thought suggested in Roughing It (1870-71), in The Gilded Age (1873), and most forcefully in What Is Man? (1906).¹

Such was Mark Twain's preoccupation with the education of man the moral agent that he failed, according to one critic, to investigate the more speculative branches of philosophy.

Mark Twain's philosophy of life, one is forced to conclude, must have had its foundation in the more rigid eighteenth-century trends of thinking. If he could have realized the scope of nineteenth-century speculation, his conclusions concerning man's place in the cosmos would have been a larger and more valuable contribution to human thought. He would have been drawn into some theory concerning the whence and whither of man in the universe of mind and matter. Instead, he was almost wholly preoccupied with the narrow, bitter problem of why men are not supermen. The question of the immortality of the soul found, after all, a rather slight place in his thinking, as well as the implications of the theory of evolution as they concern man's destiny.

2

But Mark Twain was not a speculator. Complexities annoyed him; he worked with facts, with matter tangible and practical. If he neglected the soul,

1

The dates are taken from Paine. The date for What Is Man? is that of the privately printed edition.

2

Minnie Brashear, op. cit., p. 242.

the reason was that he could not get at the fact of the soul; if he was preoccupied with the "narrow, bitter problem of why men are not supermen," his preoccupation was predicated upon the fact, related by history and corroborated by his own experience, that man, through all the ages of darkness and light, had not arrived at a state of moral development commensurate with his superb possibilities. Let those who will call this interest narrow and bitter, but to Mark Twain, improving mankind was much more important than scholarly speculation about insoluble phenomena.

There is, perhaps, no record in which Mark Twain makes his position clearer than in his letter to Andrew Lang in 1889.³ He is speaking about the acceptance of his work by critics, and his plea is that an author's stated purpose should be considered before his work is finally judged. Here is Clemens' purpose as he expressed it to Lang:

The thin top crust of humanity--the cultivated--are worth pacifying, worth pleasing, worth coddling, worth nourishing and preserving with dainties and delicacies, it is true, but to be a caterer to that little faction is no very dignified or valuable occupation, it seems to me; it is merely feeding the overfed, and there must be small satisfaction in that. It is not that little minority who are already saved that are the best worth trying to uplift, I should think, but the mighty mass

³ In the volume of Letters, the date of this correspondence is 1889. In the chronological table which Paine appends to the Biography, the date is given as 1890. See Works, XXXIII, 1680. We may suppose that 1889 is the correct year.

of the uncultivated who are underneath. That mass will never see the Old Masters--that sight is for the few; but the chromo maker can lift them all one step upward toward appreciating art; they cannot have the opera, but the hurdy-gurdy and the singing class lift them a little way toward that far light; they will never know Homer, but the passing rhymester of their day leaves them higher than he found them; they may never hear of the Latin classics, but they will strike step with Kipling's drum-beat, and they will march; for all Jonathan Edwards's help they will die in their slums, but the Salvation Army will beguile some of them up to pure air and a cleaner life; they know no sculpture, the Venus is not even a name to them, but they are a grade higher in the scale of civilization by the ministrations of the plaster-cast than they were before it took its place upon their mantle and made it beautiful to their unexpected eyes.

Indeed, I have been misjudged from the very first. I have never tried in even one single instance to help cultivate the cultivated classes. I was not equipped for it, either by native gifts or training. And I have never had any ambition in that direction, but always hunted for bigger game--the masses. I have seldom deliberately tried to instruct them, but have done my best to entertain them. To simply amuse them would have satisfied my dearest ambition at any time; for they could get instruction elsewhere, and I had two chances to help to the teacher's one: for amusement is a good preparation for study and a good healer of fatigue after it. ...

4

Is not this division of people into cultivated and uncultivated classes thoroughly in harmony with the Old Man's analysis of the mental

4

Works, XXXV, 527-528.

process? The lower orders in the ranks of civilized beings act upon instinct--thought that "walks in its sleep," as it were; whereas thinking men form their decisions upon the basis of new experiences, new associations, new influences. "Nations," says the Old Man, "do not think, they only feel. They get their feelings at second hand through their temperaments, not their brains." It was to these unpracticed brains that Mark Twain wished to appeal. And although it would be wrong to hint, even, that his philosophy aimed at producing a genius out of every man, still, in accordance with the terms of his definition of man, iron men could be trained up to the utmost possibilities of iron, leaden men, to the greatest proficiency of lead, gold men, up to gold's capacity, and so on.

This study does not reveal, then, many of the "dainties and delicacies" which would have made the conjectured "larger and more valuable contribution to human thought," or which would have satisfied the definition of an artist according to Van Wyck Brooks. What it does reveal is something more solid, basically empiric, and refreshingly masculine. That Mark Twain was qualified to make such a contribution we have the testimony of his contemporaries, mentioned earlier in this study, and we have the following additional comment from an American educator. Clemens J. France, speaking in general terms, declares that "knowledge of men and sympathy with men are the two chief conditions in educating them; a third is freedom from prejudice." Then, specifically, he adds:

Few men of our day have shown a keener insight into human nature or seen men under

more various aspects than has Mr. S. L. Clemens. Add to this a rare capacity for sympathy, together with an unusual freedom from prejudice, and the qualification of our great American humorist to speak as an oracle in educational matters is apparent. 5

The earliest indication of Mark Twain's interest in education takes us back to the time when he was roughing it in Nevada. We learn from his biographer that during the days when he was reporting the meeting of the territorial legislature for the Enterprise, "sometimes, after the turmoil of a legislative morning, he would drop in to Miss Keziah Clapp's school and listen to the exercises." 6 Now we do not know the exact nature of his visits to the school room, but there is a hint as to where his interest lay and the influence of those visits upon him. In 1899 Mark Twain wrote a paper entitled "A Simplified Alphabet." The merits of his proposals are of no concern here, but we are interested in what he proposed, and why. He explains his purpose as follows:

The heart of our trouble [in spelling] is with our foolish alphabet. It doesn't know how to spell, and can't be taught. In this it is like all other alphabets except one, the phonographic. That is the only complete alphabet in the world. It can spell and correctly pronounce any word in the language. That admirable alphabet...can be learned in an hour or two. In a week the student can learn to write it with some little facility, and

5
Clemens J. France, "Mark Twain as an Educator." Education. (Jan., 1910), XXI, 266.

6
Works, XXXI, 247.

to read it with considerable ease. I know, for I saw it tried in a public school in Nevada forty-five 7 years ago, and was so impressed by the incident that it has remained in my memory ever since.

8

When his own children became old enough to receive instruction, his interest in the learning process was intensified. He had long been interested in games for children, and he now had an opportunity to experiment. His theory is illustrated in the white-washing episode in Tom Sawyer. Once a child, or a grown-up even, believes learning or white-washing is work, he becomes recalcitrant in his endeavor; but remove the idea of unpleasant labor and the child is eager, will even beg, to take a hand. Hence it was that Mark Twain instituted in his own home what we might call visual aids to education:

Dates are hard things to remember because they consist of figures; figures are monotonously unstriking in appearance, and they don't take hold, they form no pictures, and so they give the eye no chance to help. Pictures are the thing. Pictures can make dates stick. They can make nearly anything stick--particularly if you make the pictures yourself.

9

Sixteen years ago when my children were little creatures the governess was trying to

 7

A slight exaggeration. He went to Nevada in 1861. "A Simplified Alphabet" was written in 1899. "Thirty-five years ago" would have been a closer estimate.

8

Works, XXVI, 256. The italics are mine.

9

"How to Make History Dates Stick," Works, XXVI, 141.

hammer some primer histories into their heads. Part of this fun--if you like to call it that--consisted in the memorizing of the accession dates of the thirty-seven personages who had ruled over England from the Conqueror down. These little people found it a bitter, hard contract. It was all dates, they all looked alike, and they wouldn't stick. Day after day of the summer vacation dribbled by, and still the Kings held the fort; the children couldn't conquer any six of them.

10

Mark Twain proceeded then to make his "game" which would aid the children in their studies. "The idea was to make them see the reigns¹¹ with their eyes." The plan, according to the story, was highly successful. "I hoped a way could be found which would let them romp in the open air while they learned the kings. I found it, and they mastered all the monarchs in a day or two."¹² Even if we allow for a bit of exaggeration as to the exact number of days, we can easily believe that Mark Twain's method had tangible merits.

It was conventionality in pedagogy, it might be added, which drew the bitterest attacks from Mark Twain. Very likely it was conventionality that created his own early disgust with schools and cut short his formal education. Paine relates the scene that took place after the death of John Clemens:

10

Ibid., p. 144.

11

Ibid.

12

Ibid.

The boy [Sam] was fairly broken down. Remorse, which always dealt with him unsparingly, laid a heavy hand on him now. Wildness, disobedience, indifference to his father's wishes, all were remembered; a hundred things, in themselves trifling, became ghastly and heart-wringing in the knowledge that they could never be undone. Seeing his grief, his mother took him by the hand and led him into the room where his father lay.

"It's all right Sammy," she said. "What's done is done, and it does not matter to him any more; but here by the side of him now I want you to promise me--"

He turned, his eyes streaming with tears, and flung himself into her arms.

"I will promise anything," he sobbed, "if you won't make me go to school! Anything!"

13

There is no record, apparently, which explains this boyish aversion to the schoolmarm and her establishment, but we can make inferences from what he wrote later. In the curious article "English As She Is Taught" Mark Twain records the following anecdote which he found in the appendix to Croker's Boswell's Johnson:

One day Mrs. Gastrel set a little girl to repeat to him [Dr. Samuel Johnson] Cato's Soliloquy, which she went through very correctly. The Doctor, after a pause, asked the child:

"What was to bring Cato to an end?"

She said it was a knife.

"No, my dear, it was not so."

"My aunt Polly said it was a knife."

"Why, Aunt Polly's knife may do, but it was a dagger, my dear."

He then asked her the difference between "bane" and "antidote," which she was unable to give. Mrs. Gastrel said:

"You cannot expect a child so young to know the meaning of such words."

He then said:

"My dear, how many pence are there in six-pence?"

"I cannot tell, sir," was the half-terrified reply.

On this, addressing himself to Mrs. Gastrel, he said:

"Now, my dear lady, can anything be more ridiculous than to teach a child Cato's Soliloquy, who does not know how many pence there are in sixpence?"

14

"English As She Is Taught" is an essay which simply reviews a little book bearing the same title. Mark Twain seems to have written his article for the purpose of vindicating the observation of Dr. Johnson, for at the end of the essay he observes:

All through this little book one detects the signs of a certain probable fact--that a large part of the pupil's "instruction"

consists in cramming him with obscure and wordy "rules" which he does not understand and has no time to understand.

15

A similar arraignment, possibly one that recalls his own experience more particularly, appears in The Gilded Age. The Hawkinses have moved from Tennessee to Missouri, and have settled fairly comfortably.

The children were put to school; at least, it was what passed for a school in those days: a place where tender young humanity devoted itself for eight or ten hours a day to learning incomprehensible rubbish by heart out of books and reciting it by rote, like parrots; so that a finished education consisted simply of a permanent headache and the ability to read without stopping to spell the words or take breath.

16

One could not be expected to believe that Sam Clemens had made such observations about teaching methods as are here recorded when he decided to quit school at the age of twelve. The evidence, however, does indicate an early interest in matters educational, and the passages cited up to this point suggest that Mark Twain was aware of current pedagogical methods; the indictments may or may not be a post-mortem of his own scholastic experiences. But if he condemned certain methods, he praised others. It is from some of this praise that we get significant hints as to what was his ideal. In a speech entitled "The Children's Theater," which he delivered in 1908, Mark Twain said:

 15

Ibid., p. 254.

16

Works, II, 47.

It is a thing worth doing that is done here. You have seen the children play. You saw how little Sally reformed her burglar. This is the only school in which can be taught the highest and most difficult lessons--morals. In other schools the way of teaching morals is revolting. Here the children who come in thousands live through each part.

17

Again, in "English As She Is Taught," he quotes from Edward Channing's article on the ideals of education which appeared in Science. We may suppose that Mark Twain subscribed to the views here expressed, as he had subscribed earlier to Dr. Samuel Johnson's dictum.

The marked difference between the books now being produced by French, English, and American travellers, on the one hand, and German explorers, on the other, is too great to escape attention. That difference is due entirely to the fact that in school and university the German is taught, in the first place to see, and in the second place to understand what he does see.

18

Let us pause for a brief summary of Mark Twain's educational views considered thus far, views primarily concerned with training the child. Mark Twain believed it was unwise to stuff the young scholar with inconsequential matter; he believed in visual aid to learning; he believed that the child should understand what he saw; and finally, he believed that the highest lessons to be taught were morals.

 17

Works, XXVIII, 333. The italics are mine.

18

Works, XXVI, 253. The italics are mine.

The earliest indication of Mark Twain's interest in educational problems, as has been suggested above, occurs in Roughing It, 1872, which dates the actual interest back to about 1863. We have noted in The Gilded Age, 1874, what may be an allusion to Clemens' own experience in school. We have been told by an educator that Tom Sawyer, 1876, has a decided educational value, a value which Mr. France calls "psychic rejuvenation."¹⁹ "The book," he says, "is Mr. Clemens' attempt to bring back the adult to these initial aspects of life which constitute at once the educational value of the book; not in enunciating maxims and truths before unknown, nor in exploiting some educational system, but in portraying so exquisitely all that a boy is, that the adult is borne back to his own childhood."²⁰ And Mr. France points out further that Clemens, no less than Dickens, deplored and hated the "Mrs. Pipchin system in education--a system which did not encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but which opened it by force, like an oyster."²¹

It might be interesting to add here that when, in 1900, Dr. Gustav Krüger edited The Adventures of Tom Sawyer for use in the German schools, his avowed reason was "that German boys might discern in Tom Sawyer a reflection of their own inner life."²² E. H. Hemminghaus, in his study

¹⁹

France, op. cit., p. 267.

²⁰

Ibid., p. 266.

²¹

Ibid., pp. 268-9.

²²

E. H. Hemminghaus, Mark Twain in Germany (Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 37-38.

Mark Twain in Germany, cites also "an anonymous critic who voiced the impression in Germany, 1899, which seemed to be in the ascendant":

Mark Twain is recognized by many--perhaps by those who judge him without knowing him--as a great buffoon, but whoever examines his works will soon find that the American humorist instructs and educates as well as amuses and cheers. No one can read Mark Twain without deriving from his works a lasting, morally invigorating experience. 23

Keeping in mind, then, these preliminary facts on the scope and variety of Mark Twain's interest in education, let us proceed to an examination of six others of his books in which there is material pertinent to this discussion. Of these books, The Prince and the Pauper, 1877-1881, was published first,

Early in this study reference was made to C. Alphonso Smith's designation of Mark Twain's writings as a series of contrasts. The Prince and the Pauper offers us one of these--the contrast between the education of a prince up to genuine princeliness, and the training of a pauper down to a position based upon artificiality and sham. Personal experience, outside influence, association--these are the educative factors. Tom Cauty, the pauper, in adapting himself to his new environment, gradually forgot his hungry sisters and his mother. His attitude toward the king, his benefactor, is interesting educationally:

Did Tom Cauty never feel troubled about the poor little rightful prince who had treated him so kindly, and flown out with such hot zeal to avenge him upon the insolent sentinel at the palace gate? Yes; his first royal days and nights were pretty well sprinkled with painful thoughts about the lost prince, and with sincere longings for his return and happy restoration to his native rights and splendors. But as time wore on, and the prince did not come, Tom's mind became more and more occupied with his new and enchanting experiences, and by little and little the vanished monarch faded almost out of his thoughts; and finally, when he did intrude upon them at intervals, he was become an unwelcome specter, for he made Tom feel guilty and ashamed.

Tom's poor mother and sisters traveled the same road out of his mind. At first he pined for them, sorrowed for them, longed to see them; but later, the thought of their coming in their rags and dirt, and betraying him with their kisses, and pulling him down from his lofty place, and dragging him back to penury and degradation and the slums, made him shudder. At last they ceased to trouble his thoughts almost wholly. And he was content, even glad; for whenever their mournful and accusing faces did rise before him now, they made him feel more despicable than the worms that crawl.

24

Such was his training that, being confronted by his mother during the coronation parade, and fearing lest his recognition of her would spoil his future, he was moved to remark contemptibly, "I do not know you, woman!"²⁵ Though he had made splendid progress in his study of Latin and Greek, in his knowledge of statecraft and social demeanor, he had failed

24

Works, XI, 235.

25

Ibid., p. 242.

to acquire a set of morals that could keep pace with his intellectual advancement.

During the same time, the young Prince, whose intellectual, social, and governmental education had been painstakingly carried on up to the time of his adventure into the big world outside the castle, was receiving his neglected moral education. He was kicked about, cuffed and buffeted, made to sleep with cattle, and even accused of theft. Strangely enough, he did not become bitter. He recognized the weakness of his people and began planning remedial measures which he would institute as soon as he should re-enter his own world.

And now and then his mind reverted to his treatment by those rude Christ's Hospital boys, and he said, "When I am king, they shall not have bread and shelter only, but also teachings out of books; for a full belly is little worth where the mind is starved, and the heart. I will keep this diligently in my remembrances that this day's lesson be not lost upon me, and my people suffer thereby; for learning softeneth the heart and breedeth gentleness and charity."

26

Among the notes appended to The Prince and the Pauper, Mark Twain tells his readers that Christ's Hospital had not been originally founded for education, but for feeding, sheltering, and clothing children from the streets. Edward VI subsequently established the "Blue Coat School for the education and maintenance of orphans and the children of

indigent persons."²⁷ In the story, Edward's addition of the educational service to the original charitable institution was the result of his own realization of the need for training the heart and mind as well as caring for the body.

But the most remarkable educational development of the story is that the young King should learn to obey his own laws. Miles Hendon, a man's man, a wholesome companion for a boy and a fit teacher for a king, instructs the lad:

"Reflect, Sire, your laws are the wholesome breath of your own royalty; shall their source resist them, yet require the branches to respect them? Apparently, one of those laws has been broken; when the King is on the throne again, can it ever grieve him to remember that when he was seemingly a private person he loyally sunk the King in the citizen and submitted to its authority?"

"Thou art right; say no more; thou shalt see that whatsoever the King of England requires a subject to suffer under the law, he will himself suffer while he holdeth the station of a subject."

28

And finally, having learned fully the value of experience, having become acquainted with all classes of people, their hopes, fears, aspirations, and daily practices, the moral Prince was able to utter these words: "The world is made wrong. Kings should go to school to their own laws at times, and so learn mercy."²⁹

27

Ibid., p. 279.

28

Ibid., p. 188.

29

Ibid., p. 229.

Such moral lessons as these which abound in The Prince and the Pauper made the book extremely well suited and easily adaptable to dramatic performance by the author's own children and the children of Charles Dudley Warner. Paine tells of the parental delight when these two families joined forces to watch and participate in the performance of this piece.³⁰ Certainly, Mark Twain had his children in mind when he wrote it, for Paine declares that he would assemble his "little audience" each evening and read them a part of the finished work, and we know that the book is dedicated "to those good-natured and agreeable children, Susy and Clara Clemens."³¹ Evidently Mark Twain felt in 1877 as he did in 1908, that acting good morals was one of the best ways to learn good morals.

The year after the appearance of The Prince and the Pauper Mark Twain published his Life on the Mississippi. It is known best for its intimate picture of his own piloting days, but there is more to the work than the delightful reminiscences which hark back to steamboat times. The latter portion of the book, usually called "dull" by critics, devotes quite some space to education and culture in the South. It will be remembered that in this book, Mark Twain pronounced his critical dicta upon Sir Walter Scott.

Sir Walter Scott is probably responsible
for the Capitol building [in Baton Rouge] ;

³⁰

Works, XXXI, 789-790.

³¹

Ibid., p. 716.

for it is not conceivable that this little sham castle would ever have been built if he had not run the people mad, a couple of generations ago, with his medieval romances. The South has not yet recovered from the debilitating influence of his books. Admiration of his fantastic heroes and their grotesque 'chivalry' doings and romantic juvenilities still survives here...; and traces of its inflated language and other windy humbuggeries survive along with it. 32

As an example of "windy humbuggery" in the South, Mark Twain inserts the following advertisement, which sets forth the merits of a Kentucky "Female College."

The president is Southern by birth, by rearing, by education, and by sentiment; the teachers are all Southern in sentiment, and with the exception of those born in Europe were born and raised in the South. Believing the Southern to be the highest type of civilization this continent has seen, the young ladies are trained according to the Southern ideas of delicacy, refinement, womanhood, religion, and propriety; hence we offer a first-class female college for the South and solicit Southern patronage. 33

"What, warder, ho!" cries Mark Twain after this advertisement, "the man that can blow so complacent a blast as that probably blows it from a castle." 34 And as a commentary upon "the highest type of civilization this continent has seen," Mark Twain appends a lengthy three-page

32

Works, XII, 332-333.

33

Ibid., pp. 334-335.

34

Ibid., p. 335.

footnote, which he labels "illustrations of it thoughtlessly omitted by the advertiser." The illustrations are press dispatches and "Extracts from the Public Journals" which recount feuds between prominent Southern personages, the kind described in Huckleberry Finn. Major O'Connor, of Knoxville, Tennessee, shot and killed General Joseph A. Mabry in a dispute "about the transfer of some property." "Professor Sharpe of the Sommerville, Tennessee, Female College, 'a quiet and gentlemanly man,'... started out in search of Captain Burton, found him playing billiards in a saloon, and blew his brains out. The Memphis Avalanche reports that the professor's course met with pretty general approval in the community." ³⁵

These are instances of Mark Twain's satirical comments on conditions in the South, where prejudices were kept alive, and where the "highest culture" permitted and approved of murder among its greater luminaries, its generals, majors, captains, and professors.

We may hold up in contrast to this criticism of Southern culture Mark Twain's appraisal of the culture and progress along the upper river.

This [he says] is an independent race who think for themselves, and who are competent to do it, because they are educated and enlightened; they read, they keep abreast of the best and newest thought; they fortify every weak place in their

land with a school, a college, a library,
and a newspaper; and they live under law.
Solicitude for the future of a race like
this is not in order.

36

This optimistic note harmonizes with what I have said earlier about Mark Twain's belief in the betterment of the human race. Here he found Americans emancipated from the shackles of tradition and prejudice. They had learned to think. They were an improvement over human beings who acted from mere instinct.

To duplicate these remarks on the importance of training in the progress of the human race, it is necessary only to turn to others of Mark Twain's books. Next, in chronological order, is A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, 1888-89. Recall Sir Boss's experiment. It was primarily educational. As soon as he came to power, he began to institute such reforms as would prove beneficial to the people.

The thing that would have best suited the circus side of my nature would have been to resign the Boss-ship and get up an insurrection and turn it into a revolution; but I knew that the Jack Cade or the Wat Tyler who tries such a thing without first educating his materials up to revolution grade is almost certain to get left. I had never been accustomed to getting left, even if I do say it myself. Wherefore, the "deal" which had been for some time working into shape in my mind was of a quite different pattern from the Cade-Tyler sort.

37

36

Ibid., p. 469. The italics are mine.

37

Works, XIV, 108. The italics are mine.

Working upon this theory, then, he proceeded to establish his new system. "The first thing you want in a new country is a patent office; then work up your school system; and after that, out with your paper."³⁸ But Sir Boss was to find that his greatest opposition was among the old folks who had ineradicable prejudices. Notice "Sandy" and her action among the swine. Here is Sir Boss's comment:

Here she was, as sane a person as the kingdom could produce; and yet, from my point of view she was acting like a crazy woman. My land, the power of training! of education! It can train a body up to believe anything.

39

His experience with Morgan Le Fay was to evoke a similar but more vehement expression against prejudice. In the castle of that famous queen he was invited to the execution of an accused venison-poacher. Sir Boss called the execution a crime. "Crime!" she exclaimed. "How thou talkest! Crime, forsooth! man, I am going to pay for him." Sir Boss, in disgust, philosophizes:

Oh, it was no use to waste sense on her. Training,—training is everything; training is all there is to a person. We speak of nature; it is folly; there is no such thing as nature; what we call by that misleading name is merely heredity and training. We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own; they are transmitted to us, trained into us. All that is original

38

Ibid., p. 70.

39

Ibid., p. 177.

in us, and therefore fairly creditable or discreditable, can be covered up and hidden by the point of a cambric needle, all the rest being atoms contributed by, and inherited from, a procession of ancestors that stretches back a billion years to the Adam-clan or grasshopper or monkey from whom our race has been so tediously and ostentatiously and unprofitably developed. And as for me, all that I think about in this plodding sad pilgrimage, this pathetic drift between the eternities, is to look out and humbly live a pure and high and blameless life, and save that one microscopic atom in me that is truly me: the rest may land in Sheol and welcome for all I care. 40

This remarkable passage might fit just as well into What Is Man? as any passage which actually appears in it. The theory of personal merit, the theory of the sequence of events, the theory of training--all these look forward to what has been called the "bitter pessimism of Mark Twain's declining years." But let us continue with Sir Boss's system.

In spite of the prejudices of the old, of the religious, and of the aristocratic, the Yankee inaugurated his reforms. His ideals were "cleanliness, education, freedom." In one of his schools, designated as "West Point," he placed promising military leaders, for he knew that the day would come when he would be forced to rely on strength of arms or strategy to overcome the prejudices of tradition. A young weaver had been through the curriculum and was ready to take his place in active service. All the positions, however, were filled by boys who could trace

their families back several generations. Sir Boss had arranged for a competitive examination, knowing that his trained West Pointer could prove himself superior in generalship to an untrained aristocrat. Such proved to be true:

It was beautiful to hear the lad lay out the science of war, and wallow in details of battle and siege, of supply, of transportation, mining and countermining, grand tactics, big strategy and little strategy, signal service, infantry, cavalry, artillery, and all about siege-guns, field-guns, Gatling guns, rifled guns, smooth-bores, musket practice, revolver practice--and not a solitary word of it all could these catfish [the board of judges, the old aristocrats] make head or tail of. ...

Education is a great thing. This was the same youth who had come up to West Point so ignorant that when I asked him "if a general officer should have a horse shot under him, on the field of battle, what ought he to do?" answered up naively and said:

"Get up and brush himself." ...

41

It will be recalled that, quite amusingly, Sir Boss undertook to educate King Arthur. The process was similar to the education of Edward VI in The Prince and the Pauper, but exceedingly more difficult. Yet all will agree that Arthur was a greatly improved king after his new experiences, his new associations.

And it will also be remembered that Sir Boss and his system failed because they were unable, in so short a time, to "educate the superstition

out of these people." In the end, after the return of Sir Boss, he found that prejudice, ignorance, unthinking action, had robbed him of all but fifty-two of his supporters. This small group, fifty-two well-trained boys, were all who remained faithful. The old folk, even those who realized the value of his improvements, were so firmly rooted in the past and were so superstitious about the powers of established authority that they turned their back on progress and reverted to the darkness of their years prior to Sir Boss's coming.

... With the boys it was different. Such as have been under our training from seven to ten years have had no acquaintance with the Church's terrors, and it was among these that I found my fifty-two.

42

Here again, then, is Mark Twain's theory of training the "machine" while it is young, before the clogging prejudicial inheritances make their inroads upon the thinking process. If there is pessimism here, the only reason for it is that fifty-two trained young minds were prevented from carrying their new ideas on to fruition.

The story of Pudd'nhead Wilson contains one of the most interesting character contrasts in all the works of Mark Twain. Tom Driscoll, heir to money and property, is changed in his cradle with Valet de Chambre, a child of the same age, a slave three-fourths white. In the story the characters do not know until the very end who is the real Tom, and who the real slave; but the reader knows, as soon as the principals begin

acting, that the character posing as the heir is a "nigger." The study is of heredity and environment. When the crisis comes which is to reinstate Tom and reduce the slave, the effects upon the two are described as follows:

The tremendous catastrophe which had befallen Tom [the real slave] had changed his moral landscape. ...Some of his low places he found lifted to ideals, some of his ideals had sunk to the valleys, and lay there with the sackcloth and ashes of pumice stone and sulphur on their ruined heads. ...In several ways his opinions were totally changed, and would never go back to what they were before, but the main structure of his character was not changed, and could not be changed. One or two very important features of it were altered, and in time effects would result from this, if opportunity offered--effects of quite a serious nature, too. Under the influence of a great mental and moral upheaval his character and habits had taken on the appearance of complete change, but after a while with the subsidence of the storm both began to settle toward their former places. He dropped gradually back into his old frivolous and easy-going ways and conditions of feeling and manner of speech, and no familiar of his could have detected anything in him that differentiated him from the weak and careless Tom of other days.

43

Is this not another application of the theory of the unchanging quality of the temperament which the Old Man so carefully explained to his pupil? The treatment here is identical with that in What Is Man?

But what about the other character, the real Tom, who was reared as a slave?

The real heir suddenly found himself rich and free, but in a most embarrassing situation. He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearings, his laugh--all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes could not mend these defects or cover them up; they only made them more glaring and more pathetic. The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen. The family pew was a misery to him, yet he could never more enter into the solacing refuge of the "nigger gallery"--that was closed to him for good and all. But we cannot follow his curious fate further--that would be a long story.

44

But anyone who is familiar with Mark Twain's views on training can visualize the real Tom Driscoll at the end of "a long story." Handicapped as he had been, yet, placed in proper surroundings, subjected to the influence of proper associations, he could rise, in the course of time, to the limits of his temperament. He could be educated--whereas the real slave had been educated, but never rose above the limits of his temperament, was never anything but a "nigger." This training by association was a very important part of Mark Twain's system of education, but it is not new in Pudd'nhead Wilson, or in What Is Man? It may be

 44

Ibid., p. 202.

dated as far back as the letters from the Sandwich Islands. The young
 reporter had met the United States Ambassador to China. We do not know
 many of the details of the relationship between the two, but we do know
 that Mark Twain was deeply impressed with the polish and learning of
 Mr. Burlingame, whose advice was: "Avoid inferiors. Seek your com-
 radeship among your superiors in intellect and character; always climb." 46

Notice the application of this theory in Joan of Arc. The D'Arc
 brothers, Noel, and the Paladin had traveled far in the train of their
 former playmate. But their aspect at court was far different from that
 which they had presented as simple peasants in Domremy. "It was fine
 to see how soon their country differences and awkwardnesses melted away
 under this pleasant sun of deference and disappeared, and how lightly
 and easily they took to their new atmosphere." 47 Even the narrator, the
 Sieur Louis de Conte, discovered that the new associations called forth
 hidden capabilities of which he had known nothing:

The boys were amazed that I could make such
 a poem as that out of my own head, and so
 was I, of course, it being as much a sur-
 prise to me as it could be to anybody, for
 I did not know that it was in me. If any-
 body had asked me if it was in me, I should
 have told them frankly no, it was not.

45

1865.

46

Works, XXXVII, 125.

47

Works, XVIII, 205.

That is the way with us; we may go on half of our life not knowing such a thing is in us, when in reality it was there all the time, and all we needed was something to turn up that would call for it. ...All that was necessary in my case was for this lovely and inspiring girl to cross my path, and out came the poem, and no more trouble to me to word it and rhyme it and perfect it than it was to stone a dog. No, I should have said it was not in me, but it was.

48

The "pleasant sun of deference," which was made to shine for the characters in Joan of Arc by a change in association, had also a second result: it produced a spirit of self-reliance, another component in the educational system of Mark Twain. Besides the illustrations of the self-reliant spirit which have already been presented, there are two passages in the short story "A Horse's Tale" which embody further applications of Mark Twain's theory of education. Cathy, the little Spanish child, has come to live with her uncle, General Alison, Commander of Fort Paxton, where are posted the Seventh Cavalry and the Ninth Dragoons of the United States Army. The soldiers, eighteen hundred of them, have been captivated by the little girl, and all consider her as their own. The General writes to his sister:

These bronzed veterans of mine are very good mothers, I think, and wiser than some other mothers; for they let her take lots of risks, and that is a good

education for her; and the more risks she takes and comes successfully out of, the prouder they are of her. ...

49

She [Cathy] has become a rather extraordinary rider, under the tutorship of a more than ordinary teacher--BB, which is her pet name for Buffalo Bill. ...He has not only taught her sixteen ways of breaking her neck, but twenty-two ways of avoiding it. He had infused into her the best and surest protection of a horseman--confidence. He did it gradually, systematically, little by little, a step at a time, and each step made sure before the next was essayed. And so he inched her along up through terrors that had been discounted by training before she reached them, and therefore were not recognizable as terrors when she got to them. ...

50

This is the same method, observe, that Sir Boss used on his faithful fifty-two. They had no superstitious regard for the terrors of the interdict because those terrors had all been discounted by training before they came, and, consequently, were not recognized.

Thus, from ten works covering a period from 1863 to 1906, but not including What Is Man? we have examined evidences of Mark Twain's varied interest in education and his hope for the betterment of the human race. The educative elements as they appear in these ten works may be classified somewhat as follows: psychic rejuvenation, as in the boy books; personal experience, outside influence, association, as in the

49

Works, XXVII, p. 162.

50

Ibid., p. 164.

travel books and stories; eradication of prejudice, as in A Connecticut Yankee, Life on the Mississippi, and Pudd'nhead Wilson; and self-reliance, as in the story "A Horse's Tale."

Let us return now to What Is Man? According to Mark Twain, man is an impersonal machine, but we must remember that the machine is qualified; the machine of What Is Man? is not the ordinary kind. The machine has a moving Impulse, an internal Spirit, a Conscience. In this essay of approximately twenty-two thousand words, which has been labeled by some critics the hopeless wailing of a bitter old man--in this essay of twenty-two thousand words, almost one-third is devoted to the subject of educating the machine. When one considers that a great part of the remaining two thirds is anecdote and illustration, this one third looms even larger.

Man, according to the essay, is divided into three mechanisms, the physical, the mental, and the moral. But the Old Man does not stop with mere division. He has illustrated how these various components operate, and next he explains how each may be trained to elevate its ideals "upward and still upward."

Training the Physical

The Old Man, in his discussion of the machine--the human machine--has spoken of the possibility of creating a working mechanism out of

51

Mr. DeVoto labels the essay, the Autobiography, and The Mysterious Stranger "Symbols of despair."

stone, or native rock, and the Young Man has agreed that such a creation could not perform so satisfactorily as one made of refined metal. The Old Man continues his lesson:

- O. M. ...What makes the grand difference between the stone engine and the steel one? Shall we call it training, education? Shall we call the stone engine a savage and the steel one a civilized man? The original rock contained the stuff of which the steel one was built--but along with it a lot of sulphur and stone and other obstructing inborn heredities, brought down from the old geologic age--prejudices, let us call them. Prejudices which nothing within the rock itself had either power to remove or any desire to remove. Will you take note of that phrase?
- Y. M. Yes. I have written it down: 'Prejudices which nothing within the rock itself had either power to remove or any desire to remove.' Go on.
- O. M. Prejudices which must be removed by outside influences or not at all. ... The iron's prejudice against ridding itself of the cumbering rock. To make it more exact, the iron's absolute indifference as to whether the rock be removed or not. Then comes the outside influence and grinds the rock to powder and sets the ore free. The iron in the ore is still captive. An outside influence smelts it free of the clogging ore. The iron is emancipated iron, now, but indifferent to further progress. An outside influence beguiles it into the Bessemer furnace and refines it into steel of the first quality. It is educated, now--its training is complete. And it has reached its limit. By no possible process can it be educated into gold. Will you set that down? ...There are gold men, and tin men, and copper men, and leaden men and

steel men, and so on. ...In each case, to get the best results, you must free the metal from its obstructing prejudicial ores by education--smelting, refining, and so forth.

52

The works written before What Is Man? illustrate Mark Twain's insistence upon the removal of prejudice, the value of associations and outside influences. His own biography, too, reads like an exemplification of these ideas, with special emphasis on the theory that chance events play an important part in the life of the individual. The article "The Turning Point in My Life" develops the subject. For example, it is known that young Sam found a loose page from a history book flying across the street; he read it and conceived a life-long love for Joan of Arc, for the stray page was part of her story.⁵³ He found a fifty-dollar bank note--it changed his life. We gather from the repeated appearance⁵⁴ of this idea, dating as far back as Roughing It, that Mark Twain was thoroughly convinced of its applicability to man's life. "The chance reading of a book or a paragraph in a newspaper can start a man on a new track and make him renounce his old associations and seek new ones that are in sympathy with his new ideals: and the result, for that man, can be an entire change of his way of life."⁵⁵

52Works, XXVI, 3-4.

53

Works, XXX, 81.

54

Take, for example, the discovery of the "blind lead" by Sam and Cal Higbie. Circumstances--his partner's neglect, a sick friend, a misunderstanding--these chance occurrences prevented his becoming at the time a wealthy man (Works, III, 271-287).

55

Works, XXVI, 46.

What then, the Young Man wants to know, is the scheme of procedure in training men. Is it something new?

O. M. Not a new [scheme] --an old one.
Old as mankind.

Y. M. What is it?

O. M. Merely the laying of traps for people. Traps baited with Initiatory Impulses toward high ideals. It is what the tract distributor does. It is what the missionary does. It is what governments ought to do. ...

Y. M. Do you believe in the doctrine that man is equipped with an intuitive perception of good and evil?

O. M. Adam hadn't it.

Y. M. But man has acquired it since?

O. M. No. I think he has no intuitions of any kind. He gets all his ideas, all his impressions from the outside. ...

Y. M. You have said training is everything; that training is the man himself, for it makes him what he is.

O. M. I said training and another thing. ...That other thing is temperament--that is, the disposition you were born with. You can't eradicate your disposition nor any rag of it--you can only put a pressure on it and keep it down and quiet. ...

56

The training of the two characters in Fudd'nhead Wilson likewise supports this theory. One's environment is important, but it can not

train the machine beyond the limit set by his temperament--his make.

The Young Man denies the value of training, if one's physical equipment--his born temperament--is changeless. Whereupon, it is discovered that the Young Man has a fierce temper, which, for two years, he has been trying to curb and control. But in spite of his good intentions, he flies off the handle and unmercifully scolds the household servant. The Old Man uses the temper as an object lesson.

O. M. Have you never managed to keep back a scolding?

Y. M. Oh, certainly--many times.

O. M. More times this year than last?

Y. M. Yes a good many more.

O. M. More times last year than the year before?

Y. M. Yes.

O. M. There is a large improvement, then, in the two years?

Y. M. Yes, undoubtedly.

O. M. Then your question [as to the value of training] is answered. You see, there is use in training. Keep on. Keep faithfully on. You are doing well.

Y. M. Will my reform reach perfection?

O. M. It will. Up to your limit.

Y. M. My limit? What do you mean by that?

O. M. You remember that you said that I said training was everything. I

corrected you, and said 'training and another thing.' That other thing is temperament--that is, the disposition you were born with. You can't eradicate your disposition nor any rag of it--you can only put a pressure on it and keep it down and quiet. ...You will never get rid of your temper; but by watching it you can keep it down nearly all the time. Its presence is your limit. Your reform will never quite reach perfection for your temper will beat you now and then, but you will come near enough. You have made valuable progress and can make more. There is use in training. Immense use. Presently you will reach a new stage of development, then your progress will be easier; will proceed on a simpler basis anyway.

57

This, we see, is the application of the "Admonition" in terms of the physical. The temperament cannot be changed, but its baser qualities can be subordinated, so that the machine, of whatever make it happens to be, can get the maximum performance up to its limit.

Training the Mental

We have learned about the mental mechanism that its action is automatic, that it has no command over itself, that its owner has no command over it. It can think, but the thought has to originate outside the mechanism. Its chief function is that of critic when a choice has to be made. The application of the Admonition in terms of the Mental is easy. If thought is cumulative--simply the putting together of ideas

received from the outside--then the training lies in affording the mind new ideas, new associations, new experiences.

...All training is one form or another of outside influence, and association is the largest part of it. A man is never anything but what his outside influences have made him. They train him downward or they train him upward--but they train him; they are at work upon him all the time.

Y. M. Then if he happen by the accidents of life to be evilly placed there is no help for him, according to your notions--he must train downward.

O. M. No help for him? No help for this chameleon? It is a mistake. It is in his chameleonship that his greatest good fortune lies. He has only to change his habitat--his associations. But the impulse to do it must come from the outside--he cannot originate it himself, with that purpose in view. ...The accident of a broken leg brought a profane and ribald soldier under religious influences and furnished him a new ideal. From that accident sprang the Order of the Jesuits, and it has been shaking thrones, changing policies, and doing other tremendous work for two hundred years--and will go on.

58

The genius of Shakespeare, even, can be explained in accordance with the terms of this theory of association:

...The threads and colors came to him from the outside; outside influences, suggestions, experiences (reading, seeing plays, playing

plays, borrowing ideas, and so on), framed the pattern in his mind and started up its admirable and complex machinery, and it automatically turned out that pictured and gorgeous fabric which still compels the astonishment of the world. If Shakespeare had been born and bred on a barren and unvisited rock in the ocean his mighty intellect would have had no outside material to work with, and could have invented none; and no outside influences, teachings, moldings, persuasions, inspirations, of a valuable sort, and could have invented none. And so Shakespeare would have produced nothing. In Turkey he would have produced something--something up to the highest limit of Turkish influences, associations and training. In France he would have produced something better--something up to the highest limit of French influences and training. In England he rose to the highest limits attainable through the outside helps afforded by that land's ideals, influences, and training.

59

It is interesting to note at this point that Mark Twain seems to have borrowed even the idea that no thought is original. The idea came to him from the outside, as he relates in the first volume of the Autobiography. Joseph Goodman had noticed in 1872 that the dedication to The Innocents Abroad sounded very much like a borrowing from Oliver Wendell Holmes. Clemens denied the charge, but noticed, after he had made a comparison between the two pieces, that there was an unaccountable similarity of ideas. He wrote to Holmes, apologizing for what seemed to be plagiarism. The Doctor replies:

...All our phrasings are our spiritualized shadows cast multitudinously from our readings:

no happy phrase of ours is ever quite original with us; there is nothing of our own in it except some slight change born of our temperament, character, environment, teachings, and associations; this slight change differentiates it from another man's manner of saying it, stamps it with our special style, and makes it our own for the time being. ...

And Mark Twain, commenting upon this sentiment, wrote: "In the thirty-odd years which have elapsed since then I have satisfied myself that what Dr. Holmes said was true."⁶⁰ Can it be possible that the genial Dr. Holmes contributed to the "despair and pessimism" of Mark Twain, thirty years before they made their appearance in the Autobiography? And was Dr. Holmes a pessimist? Professor Brooks calls Mark Twain's passage about Shakespeare "sour grapes."⁶¹ Does Dr. Holmes write "sour grapes" too?

The matter of training the mental machine to higher and ever higher ideals involves change, stimulation, inspiration. Just as in Joan of Arc the young Sieur de Conte discovered that his new associations brought to the surface his latent capabilities, so all men will reach the ultimate perfection possible to their respective machines, if they take the advice offered by Burlingame—"always climb—seek your comradeship among your superiors in character and intellect."

60

Works, XXXVI, p. 241.

61

Brooks, op. cit., p. 24.

Training the Moral

The whole "Me," the Old Man explains, is composed of the various mechanisms under the control of the Master Passion, or Conscience. "It can be trained to prefer that which will be for the man's good." "It is built out of born-temperament and an accumulation of multitudinous outside influences and trainings." An instance will suffice to illustrate the method of this training process.

Y. M. A British troop-ship was crowded with soldiers and their wives and children. She struck a rock and began to sink. There was room in the boats for the women and children only. The colonel lined up his regiment on deck and said 'it is our duty to die, that they may be saved.' There was no murmur, no protest. The boats carried away the women and children. When the death-moment was come, the colonel and his officers took their several posts, the men stood at shoulder-arms, and so, as on dress parade, with their flag flying and their drums beating, they went down for duty's sake. Can you view it as other than that?

O. M. It was something as fine as that, as exalted as that. Could you have remained in those ranks and gone down to your death in that unflinching way?

Y. M. Could I? No, I could not.

O. M. Think. Imagine yourself there, with that watery doom creeping higher and higher around you.

Y. M. I can imagine it. I feel all the horror of it. I could not have endured it. I could not have remained in my place. I know it.

...

O. M. It was more than a thousand men, yet not one of them flinched. Some of them must have been born with your temperament; if they could do that great duty for duty's sake, why not you? Don't you know that you could go out and gather together a thousand clerks and mechanics and put them on that deck and ask them to die for duty's sake, and not two dozen of them would stay in the ranks to the end?

Y. M. Yes, I know that.

O. M. But you train them, and put them through a campaign or two; then they would be soldiers; soldiers with a soldier's pride, a soldier's self-respect, a soldier's ideals. They would have to content a soldier's spirit then, not a clerk's, not a mechanic's. They could not content that spirit by shirking a soldier's duty, could they? ...As clerks and mechanics they had other ideals, another spirit to satisfy, and they satisfied it. They had to; it is the law. Training is potent. Training toward higher and higher, and ever higher ideals is worth any man's thought and labor and diligence.

62

In this chapter I have endeavored to do three things: first, to show Mark Twain's interest in matters pertaining to education generally; second, to present from the works evidences that this interest had some influence on the characters he created; and third, to present the educational system of What Is Man? We have learned that, if man is a machine, he is a superlative machine; if he operates poorly because of "clogging prejudicial ore," he can be trained free of those obstructing

inheritances. And above all, we have learned that the whole scheme formulated in What Is Man? was designed to better the human race, to improve human morals. But the Young Man of the essay is still unconvinced as to the practicality of the system. "Now, then," he says, "I will ask you where is there any sense in training people to lead virtuous lives. What is gained by it?"⁶³ The reply of the Old Man discloses at once the heart of Mark Twain's thought. He was not concerned with petty laws, religions, parties, or any of the superficialities to which mankind pays homage. The basic principle of the system is honesty. The gain?

- O. M. The man himself gets a large advantage out of it [the virtuous life], and that is the main thing, to him. He is not a peril to his neighbors, he is not a damage to them--and so they get an advantage out of his virtues. That is the main thing to them. It can make this life comparatively comfortable to the parties concerned; the neglect of this training can make this life a constant peril and distress to the parties concerned.

64

In this statement, which approximates the theory of "virtue for its own sake," lies the seed of the Admonition. The Young Man puts the question:

If you were going to condense into an Admonition your plan for the betterment of the race's condition, how would you word it?

63

Ibid., p. 144.

64

Ibid.

- O. M. Diligently train your ideals upward and still upward toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and the community.

65

There is one remaining aspect of the human machine we must look at before we can understand completely Mark Twain's philosophy. Although the machine has been qualified, although the Old Man has established a system of training whereby the machine may elevate its ideals, still it would appear that such a machine, always moved to action by some outside influence, is nothing more than a mere checker, or chessman. The question arises at this point--Is Mark Twain's human machine capable of action per se? That is, once it has been prompted to action by some external suggestion, does it have an internal force which will keep the action going. The answer to this question is distinctive enough to require separate treatment.

 65

Ibid., p. 54. The italics are mine.

CHAPTER III

THE THEORY OF ENERGY

Suppose we return for a moment to the philosopher's original figure: "Man the machine--man the impersonal engine. ...He is moved, directed, commanded," says the author, "by exterior influences--solely.¹ He originates nothing, not even a thought."

Now granting that a man originates nothing, yet we must admit that any machine-- Mark Twain's human machine or an actual engine--is capable of physical energy. If by external influences the machine is moved, the result is motion; if he is directed, there is attainment; if he is commanded, there is obedience--each passive influence resulting in the active energy of the machine. The Young Man correctly observed that man could not control the machine, but he failed to notice that man could engage the machine's energy. The Old Man calls attention to this point. "When your mind is racing along...open your mouth and begin talking upon that matter--or take your pen in hand and use that. It will interest your mind and concentrate it."²

¹
Vide supra, Ch. I, p. 24.

²
Works, XXVI, 71

The ability of man to apply himself to a task and remain at it until its completion--such is the basis of Mark Twain's theory of energy. When one of the exemplary characters in What Is Man? "set himself" the task of becoming brave, the desire to become brave was suggested from without, but the process of becoming brave was a matter of personal application--the expenditure of energy. Had Mark Twain never exploited this idea, as such, even if we had to infer it merely from his Biography or from the autobiographical works, the examples of its application would be far too numerous to overlook in an analysis of his philosophy. One article, "The Turning Point in My Life," furnishes instances enough to establish his conviction that energy, as distinct from stimulus, is self-generated. For example, when young Sam found the fifty-dollar banknote and decided to go to South America, he acted upon the decision his machinery had made to content his Master Passion. He met Bixby on the way down the river: he decided to become a river-pilot. Life on the Mississippi tells the story of the energy the pilot's cub spent in attaining mastery over the difficulties of the profession. But the point is this: the success of Mark Twain's ambitions was not determined by the strength of his desires, but by the exertions of the cub himself toward the attainment of his goal.

A question arises at this point which we must pause briefly to consider. If Mark Twain believed so thoroughly in the expenditure of energy as a means to success, how shall we reconcile this with the fact that some of his own stories suggest that he was lazy? A word of

explanation is necessary. Mark Twain encouraged the belief that he was lazy, but the facts seem to be that he used his indolence as a source of comic effect, just as to serve his literary purpose in Roughing It, he continued to play the innocent tenderfoot long after he had become a veteran of the frontier. In that book he repeatedly claims that he shirked such unpleasant tasks as "screening tailings"³ in a silver mine, or rowing a boat on the excursion to the island in Mono Lake.⁴ Mark Twain apparently wished to leave with the reader of such incidents as these, and others, especially those recounted in the Autobiography, the feeling that he was lazy, but when we recall his inexhaustible energy as an imaginative boy, as a youthful typesetter in New York who spent his nights in the printers' library, as a night watchman in New Orleans, as a cub pilot on the Mississippi, as a miner, as a reporter in the Sandwich Islands, as a crusading pilgrim in the Holy Land, performing all the peregrinations of the ordinary tourist and in addition turning out fifteen hundred words a day,⁵ as editor of the Buffalo Express, working "like a dog," and as an incessant reader and writer and speaker all the rest of his days,—when we keep in mind all these things, we are forced to discount his avowals of indolence. Certainly, he was not fond of rough labor; possibly he was like Huck: since he did the "dreaming," he should be exempt from the more unromantic

³
Works, III, 247.

⁴
Ibid., p. 264.

⁵
Works, XXX, 331.

business of digging for the treasure. Still, if he personally despised hard work, he learned to do so from experience. And if hard, unpleasant tasks became necessary, he was not in the habit of shirking them: witness his struggle late in life to repay every cent of the debts left by the failure of his publishing house--debts for which he was not legally responsible.

There is another interesting sidelight to the matter of Mark Twain's laziness considered in connection with his theory of energy. He encouraged the belief that he was indolent, to be sure, and made remarks about his fear of work primarily for the laughter they would provoke. But as he grew older, remarks of a different sort began to show up on his pages. Notice an illustration or two:

I am so indolent, and all forms of study are so hateful to me, that although I was several years living constantly on steamboats I have never learned all the parts of a steamboat. The names of the parts were in my ear daily whose office and location I was ignorant of, and I never inquired the meaning of those names. For instance, I think I never saw the day when I could describe the marks on a lead line. I never knew what "in the run" meant--I couldn't find the run in a steamboat today and be sure I was right.

6

Again, in the Notebook, we find an entry for June 6, 1891.

Clemens was on board the Gascoigne, bound for Europe:

6

Mark Twain's Notebook, ed. A. B. Paine (New York: Harpers, 1935), p. 160.

Life preservers: square blocks of cork--
 Nicholson pavement--over my head, sup-
 ported on slats. I have often yearned
 to know how you get them down and how
 you use them, and I think it a mark of
 the perfection of my native procrastina-
 tion that I continually put it off. Are
 there ten in our three hundred who have
 done differently?

7

Evidently, Mark Twain came to judge man's energy-output accord-
 ing to an absolute standard, and to believe that anything short of that
 standard was laziness. One could hardly condemn this kind of "indolence"
 and procrastination, for while Mark Twain did not learn the things he
 enumerates, he was yet learning other things--things more valuable for
 the business he was engaged in. The reader will observe that wherever
 there is one of these auto-condemnations, there is usually some quali-
 fying clause. In a letter to Orion written in 1869 he declares:

In twelve months (or rather I believe it
 is fourteen), I have earned just eighty
 dollars by my pen---...altogether the
 idlest, laziest 14 months I ever spent in
 my life. ...I now have less than three
 thousand six hundred dollars in the bank
 out of the eight or nine thousand I have
 made during those months lecturing.

8

The point is clearer, I believe, when we measure his energy-output by
 material standards. Only eighty dollars in fourteen months--we might
 call that evidence of his laziness; but when we read that during the

7

Ibid., p. 216.

8

Works, XXIV, p. 158.

same fourteen months he earned eight or nine thousand dollars in addition to "being lazy," we know better how to understand his usage of the word.

In spite of the references to Mark Twain's laziness, then, we may suppose that he believed wholeheartedly in his theory of energy. The experience which the youthful Sam had as secretary to Senator Stewart supports the assumption that he did subscribe to the belief in hard work. This was the only job he ever considered a total failure. He left the position for a harder, less remunerative post, and enjoyed the change. "To be busy," he wrote to Orion, "is a man's only happiness--and I am--⁹ otherwise I should die." When later, as a result of his social and literary successes on the Coast and in the East he was offered the position of Postmaster of San Francisco, a position which would have meant security and prestige, he wrote to his brother of his refusal:

...Surely government pay must be nauseating food for a man--a man whom God has enabled to saw wood and be independent. It really seemed to me a falling from grace, the idea of going back to San Francisco nothing better than a mere postmaster, albeit the public would have thought I came gilded with honors, and in great glory.

10

Obviously the issue of this decision was moral. Mark Twain knew nothing of his future--for all he could know he would have to go back to pocket-

 9

Ibid., p. 150.

10

Ibid.

mining on Jackass Hill, but he had confidence in what his energy could produce, and preferred the freedom of uncertainty to the bondage of a sinecure, for sinecures, he believed, had a softening, debilitating influence upon the inside of man. The following anecdote, told by Opie Read, illustrates Mark Twain's views upon this subject:

"How far should a community go in giving assistance to the needy?" asked one of our party as we were riding, in the smoking compartment with Mark Twain, on the way to New York. "It seems to me," continued the speaker, "that if you do too much for them you make them lazy."

"I remember a dog I had," replied Mark Twain. "Just to humor him one time when he was scratching, I did the scratching for him, in the right places, and he was surprised and pleased."

"After that he seemed to expect me to help him out in the same way, which I did. And would you believe it, he finally got so he wouldn't do any of his own scratching at all! He would come up to me and merely point with his nose or paw to the place he wanted scratched."

"Now the point is that it wasn't laziness, for he would chase rabbits all day. It was simply a matter of habit."

"And that's the way with people. When a community does too much for them the community is upsetting one of the most essential of all human habits, the habit of looking out for yourself."

11

11

p. 31.

Opie Read, Mark Twain and I (Chicago: Reilly and Lee, 1940),

It appears that Mark Twain developed this "most essential of all human habits" very early in life. On October 26, 1853, the eighteen-year-old Sam wrote from Philadelphia:

There is only one thing that gets my 'dander up'--and that is the hands are always encouraging me: telling me 'it's no use to get discouraged--no use to get down-hearted, for there is more work here than you can do!' 'Down-hearted' the devil. I have not had a particle of such feeling since I left Hannibal, more than four months ago. I fancy they'll have to wait some time till they see me down-hearted or afraid of starving while I have strength to work and am in a city of 400,000 inhabitants.

12

It seems strange that a boy so young and inexperienced should have such strong and positive convictions, such confidence in his physical powers to satisfy the demands of his master passion. Life on earth and success in life appear even at this early age to be predicated upon what was to be his theory of energy.

And later, when he published his opinions about existence after death, we are not surprised to find Heaven operating according to the laws of his theory of energy. We get a glimpse into the hereafter as Mark Twain conceived it in the story which relates Captain Stormfield's first experiences among the angels. Sam Bartlett explains to the Captain:

Now you just remember this--heaven is as blissful and lovely as it can be; but it's just the busiest place you ever heard of. There ain't any idle people here after the first day. Singing hymns and waving palm branches through all eternity is pretty when you hear about it in the pulpit, but it's as poor a way to put in valuable time as a body could contrive. It would just make a heaven of warbling ignoramuses, don't you see? Eternal Rest sounds comforting in the pulpit, too. Well, you try it once, and see how heavy time will hang on your hands. Why, Stormfield, a man like you, that had been active and stirring all his life, would go mad in six months in a heaven where he hadn't anything to do. Heaven is the very last place to come to rest in,--and don't you be afraid to bet on that! ...It's the same here as it is on earth--you've got to earn a thing, square and honest, before you enjoy it. You can't enjoy first and earn afterwards. But there's this difference here: you can choose your own occupation, and all the powers of heaven will be put forth to help you make a success of it, if you do your level best. The shoemaker on earth that had the soul of a poet in him won't have to make shoes here.

13

Self-reliance, hard work, earned enjoyments--these are the bases upon which Mark Twain predicates the happy life. But there is something else. There must be a visible effectiveness in the workman's production. Sam was not satisfied with simply fulfilling the primary requirements of his job. He drove himself to produce the result nearest the perfection possible to him, as is attested by his second letter written from Philadelphia:

 13

Works, XXVII, 241-242.

They are very particular here about spacing, justification, proofs, etc., and even if I do not make much money I will learn a great deal. ...They think it dreadful to space one line with three em spaces, and the next one with five ems. However, I expected this, and worked accordingly from the beginning; and out of all the proofs I saw, without boasting, I can say mine was by far the cleanest. In St. Louis, Mr. Baird said my proofs were the cleanest that were ever set in his office. The foreman of the Anzeiger told me the same--foreman of the Watchman the same; and with all this evidence, I believe I do set a clean proof.

14

The same pride in his work and accomplishment remained with him during his steamboat days. It was not through sheer luck that Sam was kept on the job, when many of the young pilots who had started their careers contemporaneously with him were put on the waiting board. He not only kept his job; he tells us that he had a berth on the largest boat in the trade and the hardest to pilot.

Thus, we learn from his own career that he knew the value of hard work. According to the testimony of Orion, Mr. Baird, and others, he was a fine compositor and type-setter; according to Bixby, his in-
 15
 structor on the river, he became an excellent pilot; according to Goodman

14

Minnie Brashear, op. cit., p. 156.

15

Dudley R. Hutcherson presents "evidence from excellent sources" which seems to contradict this statement as to Mark Twain's ability as a pilot. Joe Curtis of the Memphis Commercial Appeal quotes Bixby as saying that Sam "knew the Mississippi River like a book, but he lacked confidence." See Dudley R. Hutcherson, "Mark Twain As Pilot," American Literature (Nov. 1940), XII, 353-355. But regardless of what kind of pilot Mark Twain became, there seems to be no refutation of the fact that he worked hard and mastered the River.

he became a splendid reporter, and according to William Dean Howells and other critics, he became a great writer. All his successes, however accidental he thought them to be, were partially, at least, the result of his great energy.

There was something or somebody--an outside influence--that very early started Mark Twain's mental machinery to work upon what I am calling the "Theory of Energy." It may have been his father, or his mother, the village pastor, Bixby, or some other of his employers. Perhaps it was a stray page from some book, or a magazine or newspaper article. Paine prints an interesting excerpt from one of Mark Twain's river notebooks which, if it is not the earliest manifestation of his interest in the theory, is, at least one of the contributing factors in the development of it. The author of the piece is unknown:

How to take Life.---Take it just as though it was--as it is--an earnest, vital, and important affair. Take it as though you were born to the task of performing a merry part in it--as though the world had awaited for your coming. Take it as though it was a grand opportunity to do and achieve, to carry forward great and good schemes; to help and cheer a suffering, weary, it may be heartbroken brother. Now and then a man stands aside from the crowd, labors earnestly, steadfastly, confidently, and straightway becomes famous for wisdom, intellect, skill, greatness of some sort. The world wonders, admires, idolizes, and it only illustrates what others may do if they take hold of life with a purpose. The miracle, or the power that elevates the few, is to be found in

their industry, application, and perseverance under the promptings of a brave, determined spirit.

16

Although this is the sort of "success formula" that has since been made the butt of much ridicule, there seems little doubt that Mark Twain was thoroughly convinced as to the efficacy of the idea and all that it involved. So utterly did he believe in the potency of hard work that he became something of a missionary of the gospel of hard work. He never ceased trying to convert Orion to the idea. The reader must understand the relationship between Orion and Sam to appreciate the full significance of the letters which passed between them. Orion was in many respects like Colonel Sellers. His head was always full of splendid schemes which, if they could only be realized, would revolutionize the world and establish Orion as the benefactor,--the savior of civilization. He became successively a printer, lawyer, publisher, writer, lecturer, business man, and frontier administrator--but his contributions to these professions were nil, partly because his occupation with them was so ephemeral--sometimes merely planned, never actually attempted. Orion and his strange life were always a source of worry and wonder to his younger brother.

With this relationship in mind, it is not strange to see such a letter as the following from a younger brother to his elder. Here is the apostle of energy:

 16

Works, XXX, 154-155. The italics are mine.

What is government without energy? And what is a Man without energy? Nothing--nothing at all. What is the grandest thing in 'Paradise Lost'--the Arch-Fiend's terrible energy! What was the greatest feature in Napoleon's character? His unconquerable energy! Sum all the gifts that man is endowed with, and we give our greatest share of admiration to his energy, and today, if I were a heathen, I would rear a statue to Energy, and fall down and worship it!

I want a man to--I want you to--take up a line of action, and follow it out, in spite of the very devil.

17

Mark Twain is absolutely serious here, but he is not desperate or pessimistic. And I believe it would be hard to find a single instance in the collected works of Mark Twain in which he damns any member of the human race who, by his own energy, has won his place in history. There is only admiration and praise for those who earn their honors.

He had no praise or help even for a brother who would stoop to wear false honors. When Orion wrote in 1878 of his plans to take up literature as a profession (with world-rocking consequences, of course), Sam replied:

My Dear Bro. - Every man must learn his trade--not pick it up. God requires that he do it by slow and painful processes. The apprentice-hand, in blacksmithing, in medicine, in literature, in everything, is a thing that can't be hidden. It always

shows. ...If the N. Y. Weekly people know that you are my brother, they will turn the fact into an advertisement--a thing of value to them, but not to you and me. This must be prevented. ...Keep yourself out of sight until you make a strike on your own merits--there is no other way to set a fair verdict upon your merits.

18

Here again is evidence of the intrinsic honesty of Mark Twain. Here was an opportunity to establish Orion as a writer. There was capital in the scheme--he could have rid himself of responsibility for Orion, who had long been a drain upon his purse. But to capitalize thus his name when he was convinced that what Orion could write would not measure up to the standards of that name, was not Mark Twain's way. His advice to his brother was to write, if he thought he could, but to win his way on the merit of what he wrote rather than upon the superficial value of another's reputation.

It was not only to Orion, however, that Mark Twain was to preach his theory of energy. On three occasions, he tells us in the Autobiography, he was asked to furnish letters of reference for friends or relatives who wanted to enter certain occupations and who felt that a letter from Mark Twain would give them the needed "pull." Let us listen to him tell about one of these experiences:

Shortly after my marriage, in 1870, I received a letter from a young man in St. Louis who was possibly a distant relative

of mine--I don't remember now about that--but his letter said he was anxious and ambitious to become a journalist--and would I send him a letter of introduction to some St. Louis newspaper and make an effort to get him a place as a reporter? It was the first time I had had an opportunity to make a new trial of my great scheme. [He had tried it first on Hughie in California in 1862 or '63]. I wrote him and said I would get him a place on any newspaper in St. Louis; he could choose the one he preferred, but he must promise me faithfully to follow out the instructions which I should give him. He replied that he would follow out those instructions to the letter and with enthusiasm. His letter was overflowing with gratitude--premature gratitude. He asked for the instructions. I sent them. I said he must not use a letter of introduction from me or from anyone else. He must go to the newspaper of his choice and say that he was idle, and weary of being idle, and wanted work--that he was pining for work, longing for work--that he didn't care for wages, didn't want wages, but would support himself; he wanted work, nothing but work, and not work of a particular kind, but any kind of work they would give him to do. He would sweep out the editorial rooms; he would keep the inkstands full, and the mucilage bottles; he would run errands; he would make himself useful in every way he could.

I suspected that my scheme would not work with everybody--that some people would scorn to labor for nothing and would think it a matter for self-contempt; also that many persons would think me a fool to suggest such a project; also that many persons would not have character enough to go into the scheme in a determined way and test it. I was interested to know what kind of candidate this one was, but of course I had to wait some time to find out. I told him he must never ask for wages; he must never be beguiled into making that mistake; that sooner or later an offer of wages would come from somewhere, and in that case he must go straight to his employer and give him the opportunity to offer him the like wages, in which case he must stay where he

was--that as long as he was in anybody's employ he must never ask for an advance of wages; that would always come from somewhere if he proved his worthiness.

The scheme worked again. That young fellow chose his paper, and during the first few days he did the sweeping out and other humble work, and kept his mouth shut. After that the staff began to take notice of him. They saw that they could employ him in lots of ways that saved time and effort for them at no expense. They found that he was alert and willing. They began presently to widen his usefulness. Then he ventured to risk another detail of my instructions. I had told him not to be in any hurry about it, but to make his popularity secure first. He took up that detail now. When he was on his road between office and home, and when he was out on errands, he kept his eyes open, and whenever he saw anything that could be useful in the columns he wrote it out, then went over it and abolished adjectives, went over it again and extinguished other surplusages, and finally when he got it boiled down to the plain facts with the ruffles and other embroideries all gone, he laid it on the city editor's desk. He scored several successes, and saw his stuff go into the paper unpruned. Presently the city editor when short of help sent him out on an assignment. He did his best with it, and with good results. This happened with more and more frequency. It brought him into contact with all the reporters of all the newspapers. He made friends with them and presently one of them told him of a berth that was vacant, and that he could get it and the wages too. He said he must see his own employers first about it. In strict accordance with my instructions he carried the offer to his own employers, and the thing happened that was to be expected. They said they could pay that wage as well as any other newspaper--stay where he was.

This young man wrote me two or three times a year and he always had something freshly encouraging to report about my scheme. Now and then he would be offered a raise by another newspaper. He

carried the news to his own paper; his own paper stood the raise every time and he remained there. Finally he got an offer which his employers could not meet and then they parted. This offer was a salary of three thousand dollars a year, to be managing editor on a daily in a Southern city of considerable importance, and it was a large wage for that day and region. He held that post three years. After that I never heard of him any more.

19

Mark Twain tells a similar story of his nephew, Samuel E. Moffett,

20

later a journalist of some repute. Whether the account of the first young man's success is entirely in accord with history, or whether Mark Twain was embroidering a reminiscence does not matter. The odds for and against the practicability of this scheme are about equal, I suppose. But here is the fullest expression of his theory of energy. It had worked, if we may trust the evidence, in his own case, and he believed it could work for others. In 1887 he was asked to recommend to the lecture platform a lady who had never lectured, and who, so far as he knew, had no message to deliver. To Mrs. T _____ he replied:

There is an unwritten law about human successes, and your sister must bow to that law, she must submit to its requirements. In brief, the law is:

1. No occupation without an apprenticeship.
2. No pay to the apprentice.

 19

Works, XXXVII, 262-265.

20

Ibid., pp. 265-268.

This law stands right in the way of a subaltern who wants to be general before he has smelt powder; and it stands (and should stand) in everybody's way who appeals for pay or position before he has served his apprenticeship and proved himself. Your sister's course is perfectly plain. Let her inclose this letter to Maj. J. B. Pond, and offer to lecture a year for \$10 a week and her expenses, the contract to be annulable by him at any time, after a month's notice, but not annulable by her at all. The second year, he to have her services if he wants them, at a trifle under the best price offered her by anybody else.

21

We may suppose that the lady did not lecture, or that if she did, it was not with Mark Twain's recommendation. According to the philosophy which Mark Twain had developed, the venture could not have been a success. Let us apply the principles of his system to this particular machine, the untried lecturer. She had received from some outside influence the suggestion that lecturing was the activity she should undertake to satisfy her Master Passion, to content her spirit. But her Master, or Spirit, or Conscience was so untrained that it could be contented with a flimsy, dishonest activity, and her mental mechanism was so dull that it could not perceive the fundamental right and wrong in this procedure. The course which Mark Twain recommended was one that would, in the terms of the Admonition, train her own ideals upward, and would result in action which would be beneficial to her neighbors and to the community.

If we analyze the scheme proposed to the aspiring newspaper reporter, we find these four cardinal principles which are the basis of the theory of energy, and which appear repeatedly throughout the life and works of Samuel Langhorne Clemens: First, individuality of effort. The applicant for work must not go equipped with letters of reference, or with a "pull" of any kind. He must win his place by his own efforts. Second, he must show an unqualified willingness to work--to work at anything and without a question as to remuneration. Third, he must have a capacity for friendship, the ability to make himself liked in an ever-widening circle of acquaintances. Such relationships increase the possibilities for advancement. And fourth, Mark Twain stresses the ethical responsibility on the part of the worker. Observance of these four postulates is Mark Twain's guarantee of success. Throughout the stories his characters succeed or fail as they observe the principles of this procedure.

Washington Hawkins of The Gilded Age had his whole life undermined by the influence of his ever-present dream of achieving wealth and success without effort and without labor. The Tennessee Land was to make him rich. He felt no responsibility, social or ethical, until he rose in the finale and cursed the land which had cursed his house for so long. But even after Hawkins, aged thirty, had decided to give up his dream and settle down to hard work, Colonel Sellers aspired to the law,--in fact, became in his day-dream a successful practitioner before he ever hung out his shingle. He was sure of himself:

And into the law this subscriber is going. There's worlds of money in it!-- whole worlds of money. Practice first in Hawkeye, then in Jefferson, then in St. Louis, then in New York! In the metropolis of the western world! Climb, and climb, and climb--and wind up on the Supreme bench. Beriah Sellers, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, sir. A man made for all time and eternity! That's the way I block it out, sir--and it's all as clear as day--clear as the rosy morn.

22

The Colonel had the necessary confidence, but the other essentials were sadly lacking in his makeup. And while Hawkins and the Colonel were wasting their days in dreams of wealth and greatness without effort, Clay Hawkins had made quite a successful life in far-away Australia, and Philip Sterling, a steady, conscientious lad, had won all his objectives by applying to his own life the principles of Mark Twain's views on energy.

"Pudd'nhead" Wilson's success is dependent entirely upon the observance of the rules of the theory of energy. He wanted to be a lawyer, a detective, a renowned man in the community. His start was very inauspicious, but he constantly nourished his ambition and worked for its realization; finally, when his opportunity came, he was ready to make the most of it.

The list of illustrations could be lengthened. The entire story of Joan of Arc is based upon this theory of energy. What a dismal failure

her life would have been, how dismal the story of France, had the Maid merely heard the voices, but never acted.

The article "Concerning the Jews" illustrates the author's confidence in the value of work. The Jews were successful, he believed, because they knew how to make their successes.²³ Mark Twain's admiration of Mrs. Eddy was predicated, not upon her religious practice, but upon her tremendous energy in spreading that practice throughout the United States. He had the same admiration for Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and the Mormons, who overcame the worst obstacles in the way of their worship by the expenditure of energy.

What does it all add up to? Simply this: In presenting his philosophy, Mark Twain began with the thesis that man operates somewhat as a machine, functioning automatically in mind, in body, in morals. Since this operation is mechanical, the man deserves no credit, no personal credit for his output, for the product of his energy, whatever it is, is necessary for the contentment of his spirit.

But he continues by outlining a method of training the machine's spirit to demand an ever higher product, so that his interest lies, not in what man is, but what man becomes; what he develops into from the native rock all clogged with inherited prejudicial ore. That is the sole basis of merit in the works of Mark Twain. It is certainly the basis of

23

Works, XXII, 263-287.

the theory of "reward for merit" as it appears in A Connecticut Yankee. When King Arthur offered to knight Sir Boss, the Yankee objected: "I couldn't have felt really proud--satisfactorily fine and proud and set up over any title except one that should come from the nation itself, the only legitimate source; and such a one I hoped to win; and in the course of years of honest and honorable endeavor, I did win it."²⁴

Is this not practically the same refusal that Mark Twain himself gave when he was offered the Postmastership of San Francisco? And did he not, from the time of that refusal, do the same thing he made Sir Boss do in the story--set out to win a name from his people by honest and honorable endeavor? It seems apparent that Mark Twain taught his moral philosophy by example, as well as by precept. He believed his gospel and lived by it.

²⁴

Works, XIV, 67.

CHAPTER IV

THEORY OF SOCIETY

If we were to attempt at this point in our discussion a definition of society as it was conceived by Mark Twain, we should have to say: "as man is, so is society, for society is man multiplied." We have observed that according to Mark Twain, man is a rough, prejudiced, machine-like organism, but may become, through a specified system of training, a polished, unprejudiced, superlative engine. If, then, the individual is not entirely bad, the society composed of individuals cannot be entirely bad. If the individual may be improved, society may be improved.

But what becomes of Mark Twain's "pessimism" in such an interpretation? Where is the bitterness, the despair, the hopelessness? As we progress through his works it appears more and more likely that what is commonly called Mark Twain's "pessimism" is nothing more than his caustic laughter at the presumption of the classes and the gullibility of the masses, laughter, which he believed was the only cure for such diseases. Almost without exception, where Mark Twain "damns the human race," the cause of his condemnation is some kind of abuse--a being or group of beings taking credit for accomplishments which their energy did

not create, or claiming merit where no merit was due. And generally speaking, there were two kinds of abuse that called for the loudest damnings, social injustice and religious prejudice. We shall inspect with some care his views concerning each of these.

The present discussion of Mark Twain's views on society will divide itself conveniently into two parts, for Mark Twain tore down what he disliked about the social system and out of the debris built his own ideal. In the destructive process we shall see what it was that provoked his caustic utterances against the human race. But it would be unfair to stop with his bitter analysis of society; we should fail to see the true Mark Twain. For although his ruthless iconoclasm pulled down traditional sacrosancts, at least one of his books attempted the creation of an ideal state according to his own opinions. We shall discuss Mark Twain first as social analyst, then proceed to his counterbalancing synthesis.

An excerpt from a letter written to Joe Twichell in 1900 provides us with an excellent point of departure. This letter presents a statement about society--a statement which was made at the peak of his supposed pessimism, i.e. while Mark Twain was on his trip around the world, raising money to pay back the debts for which he felt an ethical responsibility. The contrast here is characteristic and according to Mark Twain's philosophy strikes at the center of all good, as well as all evil, in society.

[The Boer] is popularly called uncivilized, I do not know why. Happiness, food, shelter, clothing, wholesome labor, modest and rational ambitions, honesty, kindness, hospitality, love of freedom and limitless courage to fight for it, composure and fortitude in time of disaster, patience in time of hardship and privation, absence of noise and brag in time of victory, contentment with an humble and peaceful life void of insane excitements—if there is a higher and better form of civilization than this, I am not aware of it and do not know where to look for it. I suppose we have the habit of imagining that a lot of artistic, intellectual and other artificialities must be added, or it isn't complete. We and the English have these latter; but as we lack the great bulk of these others, I think the Boer civilization is the best of the two. My idea of our civilization is that it is a shabby poor thing and full of cruelties, vanities, arrogancies, meannesses, and hypocrisies. As for the word, I hate the sound of it, for it conveys a lie; and as for the thing itself, I wish it was in hell, where it belongs. 1

We do not have to surmise what Mark Twain means about the "cruelties, vanities, arrogances, meannesses, and hypocrisies of civilization." In The Mysterious Stranger, which Van Wyck Brooks calls the bitterest of the pessimistic expressions of Mark Twain, we have the story of the progress of civilization. The youthful Satan lets the entire history pass in procession before the eyes of the boys. This is what they see:

So with a thought, he [Satan] turned the place into the Garden of Eden, and we saw

Abel praying by his altar; then Cain came walking toward him with his club and did not seem to see us, and would have stepped on my foot if I had not drawn it in. He spoke to his brother in a language which we did not understand; then he grew violent and threatening, and we knew what was going to happen, and turned away our heads for the moment; but we heard the crash of the blows and heard the shrieks and the groans; then there was silence, and we saw Abel lying in his blood and gasping out his life, and Cain standing over him and looking down at him, vengeful and unrepentant.

Then the vision vanished, and was followed by a long series of unknown wars, murders, and massacres. Next we had the Flood, and the Ark tossing around in the stormy waters, with lofty mountains in the distance showing veiled and dim through the rain. Satan said:

'The progress of your race was not satisfactory. It is to have another chance now.'

The scene changed, and we saw Noah overcome with wine.

Next we had Sodom and Gomorrah, and 'the attempt to discover two or three respectable persons there,' as Satan described it, Next, Lot and his daughters in the cave.

Next came the Hebraic wars, and we saw the victors massacre the survivors and their cattle and save the young girls alive and distribute them around.

Next we had Jael; and saw her slip into the tent and drive the nail into the temple of her sleeping guest; and we were so close that when the blood gushed out it trickled in a little, red stream to our feet, and we could have stained our hands in it if we had wanted to.

Next we had the Egyptian wars, Greek wars, Roman wars, hideous drenchings of the earth with blood; and we saw the treacheries of the

Romans toward the Carthaginians, and the sickening spectacle of the massacre of those brave people. Also we saw Caesar invade Britain--'not because those barbarians had done him any harm, but because he wanted their land, and desired to confer the blessings of civilization upon their widows and orphans,' as Satan explained.

Next, Christianity was born. Then ages of Europe passed in review before us, and we saw Christianity and civilization march hand in hand thru those ages, 'leaving famine and death and desolation in their wake, and other signs of the progress of the human race,' as Satan observed.

And always we had wars, and more wars, and still other wars--all over Europe, all over the world. "Sometimes in the private interest of royal families," Satan said, "sometimes to crush a weak nation; but never a war started by the aggressor for any clean purpose--there is no such war in the history of the race."

"Now," said Satan, "you have seen your progress down to the present, and you must confess that it is wonderful--in its way. We must now exhibit the future."

He showed us slaughters more terrible in their destruction of life, more devastating in their engines of war, than any we had seen.

"You perceive," he said, "that you have made continual progress. Cain did his murder with a club; the Hebrews did their murders with javelins and swords; the Greeks and Romans added protective armor and the fine arts of military organization and generalship; the Christian has added guns and gunpowder; a few centuries from now he will have so greatly improved the deadly effectiveness of his weapons of slaughter that all men will confess that without Christian civilization war must have remained a poor and trifling thing to the end of time. ... It is a remarkable progress. In five or six thousand years five or six high civilizations have risen,

flourished, commanded the wonder of the world, then faded out and disappeared; and not one of them except the latest ever invented any sweeping and adequate way to kill people. They all did their best--to kill being the chiefest ambition of the human race and the earliest incident in its history--but only the Christian civilization has scored the triumph to be proud of. Two or three centuries from now it will be recognized that all the competent killers are Christians; then the pagan world will go to school to the Christian--not to acquire his religion, but his guns. The Turk and the Chinaman will buy those to kill missionaries and converts with.'

By this time his theater was at work again, and before our eyes nation after nation drifted by, during two or three centuries, a mighty procession, an endless procession, raging, struggling, wallowing through seas of blood, smothered in battle-smoke through which the flags glinted and the red jets from the cannon darted; and always we heard the thunder of the guns and the cries of the dying.

'And what does it amount to?' said Satan, with his evil chuckle. 'Nothing at all. You gain nothing; you always come out where you went in. For a million years the race has gone on monotonously propagating itself and monotonously reperforming this dull nonsense--to what end? No wisdom can guess! Who gets a profit out of it? Nobody but a parcel of usurping little monarchs and nobilities who despise you; would feel defiled if you touched them; would shut the door in your face if you proposed to call; whom you slave for, fight for, die for, and are not ashamed of it, but proud; whose existence is a perpetual insult to you and you are afraid to resent it; who are mendicants supported by your alms, yet assume toward you the airs of benefactor toward beggar; who address you in the language of master to slave, and are answered in the language of slave to master; who are worshiped by you with your mouth, while in your heart--if you have one--you despise yourselves for it. The first man was a hypocrite and a

coward, qualities which have not yet failed in his line; it is the foundation upon which all civilizations have been built."

2

There is no denying the bitterness of the picture here before us, and it is bitter primarily because it is true. But we are justified in questioning the purpose of this historic presentation of the race's cruelties. If we find the answer to our question in the supposition that Mark Twain's closing years were devoted to despair and pessimism, then we must admit that the indictment put into the mouth of Satan had no purpose other than the satisfaction of a morbid temperament. On the other hand, if we admit Mark Twain's interest in bettering the human race--an interest made obvious by our study of What Is Man?--we shall see a purpose definitely transcending the objectless one of our first assumption. Here are the facts. Mark Twain stated in his letter to Lang that he wrote always for the people, with their benefit constantly in mind. Later, in laying down the principles for his system of training, he gave as one of his methods the setting of traps for people--traps baited with initiatory impulses toward high ideals. Now, notice again the indictment. To whom is it delivered? To a simple boy, a representative of the people. Against whom is it directed? Against the people. The sense of wrong here is not that a few aristocrats have appropriated authorities and honors without deserving them, but that the people have allowed to the few the unquestioned exercise of such unearned

advantages. From beginning to end there is little variation in the burden of this song--the song of the malleable many. Man--every man--has capabilities which, by the exercise of his energies, he can perfect, up to his limit. Why, then, does man deny himself the chance to develop his own capabilities? Why does he subordinate his "silver" claims to the "brass" assumptions of others? Is not Mark Twain's purpose clear? His hope is that the reader, the individual for whom he wrote, would see his own condition pictured in the history, and would exercise his energy to improve himself first, and then, in the perfection of his own gifts, so improve the race. Mark Twain was setting traps for people; such a method did he employ for his didacticism. Throughout the works he tries to laugh them into consciousness of their stupidity, to ridicule them into action. Here follow a few examples:

In The Gilded Age Senator Dilworthy gives his appraisal of the people:

The great public is weak-minded; the great public is sentimental; the great public always turns around and weeps for an odious murderer, and prays for him, and carries flowers to his prison, and besieges the governor with appeals to his clemency, as soon as the papers begin to howl for that man's blood. In a word, the great putty-hearted public loves to 'gush.'

3

The attack is centered on the people who elect to public office a man so unprincipled, a man who despises them and boasts that he can bend them to his will by appealing to their unreasoned sympathy.

³
Works, VI, 119.

In his analysis of Christian Science, Mark Twain makes the assertion that "99/100 of the human race do not think." Would not a thoroughgoing pessimist have denied thought to all the race? But he had observed that about one percent of mankind actually did think, and that of these, half were positive for good, the other half positive for evil. Again, here is the indictment: unbelievably enough, the ninety-nine percent prefer to follow the evil, chiefly because they have not learned to think. Look in The Gilded Age at the success which the people accorded to Senator Dilworthy over Mr. Noble. Look at the triumph of the Bishop of Beauvais over the simple maid Joan of Arc. Look in The Mysterious Stranger, at the confidence which the people placed in the Astrologer and Father Adolf, charlatans both, and at their distrust of good, lovable old Father Peter. Look how easily the King and the Duke deceived the townspeople in Huckleberry Finn—how the orphaned daughters preferred to believe, without evidence, the tales of absolute strangers rather than take the advice of the loyal family physician. Look at the credulity of the people in A Connecticut Yankee: Sir Boss had just repaired the well at the monastery, had presented a brilliant display of fireworks, and had chosen to let it be called a miracle in order that his own purposes might better be served. But a quack "magician" appeared on the scene. "Observe," says Sir Boss, "how much a reputation is worth in such a country. These people had seen me do the very showiest bit of magic in history, and the only one within

their memory that had a positive value, and yet here they were, ready to take up with an adventurer who could offer no evidence of his powers but his mere unproven word.⁵ Look at the contented indolence of the people of Arthur's realm--potential thinkers, whose every act, however, was instinctive and habitual rather than rational.

Seven-tenths of the free population of the country were of just their class and degree; small "independent" farmers, artisans, etc.; which is to say, they were the nation, the actual Nation; they were about all of it that was useful, or worth saving, or really respect-worthy, and to subtract the Nation and leave behind some dregs, some refuse, in the shape of a king, nobility and gentry, idle, unproductive, acquainted mainly with the arts of wasting and destroying, and of no sort of use or value in any rationally constructed world. And yet, by ingenious contrivance, this gilded minority, instead of being in the tail of the procession where it belonged, was marching head up and banners flying, at the other end of it; had elected itself to be the Nation, and these innumerable clams had permitted it so long that they had come at last to accept it as truth; and not only that, but to believe it right and as it should be.

6

Mark Twain hoped that these lessons would increase the percentage of thinkers and lower the percentage of the "immunerable clams."

Again, in the Connecticut Yankee, Sir Boss had a chance to observe that members of a lower class would persecute their own fellows

⁵
Works, XIV, 232.

⁶
Ibid., pp. 102-103. The italics are mine.

to serve the interests of the upper class. Two peasants turned stool-pigeons against other peasants who, if caught, were sure to be hanged by the pursuing nobles.

The painful thing observable about all this business was the alacrity with which this oppressed community had turned their hands against their own class in the interest of the common oppressor. This man and woman seemed to feel that in a quarrel between a person of their own class and his lord, it was the natural and proper and rightful thing for that poor devil's whole caste to side with the master and fight his battle for him, without ever inquiring into the rights or wrongs of the matter. This man had been out helping to hang his neighbors, and had done his work with zeal, and yet was aware that there was nothing against them but a mere suspicion, with nothing back of it describable as evidence. ...It reminded me of a time thirteen centuries away, when the 'poor whites' of our South who were always despised and frequently insulted by the slave-lords around them, and who owed their base condition simply to the presence of slavery in their midst, were yet pussillanimously ready to side with the slave-lords in all political moves for the upholding and perpetuating of slavery, and did also finally muster their muskets and pour out their lives in an effort to prevent the destruction of that very institution which degraded them. 7

It is interesting to note here that Mark Twain is not dealing exclusively with European society. He is dealing with universal types.

A similar pronouncement is made in The Mysterious Stranger.

Satan speaks again:

7
Ibid., p. 298.

...I know your race. It is made up of sheep. It is governed by minorities, seldom or never by majorities. It suppresses its feelings and its beliefs and follows the handful that makes the most noise. Sometimes the noisy handful is right, sometimes wrong; but no matter, the crowd follows it. The vast majority of the race, whether savage or civilized, are secretly kind-hearted and shrink from inflicting pain, but in the presence of the aggressive and pitiless minority they don't dare to assert themselves. Think of it! One kind-hearted creature spies upon another, and sees to it that he loyally helps in iniquities which revolt both of them. Speaking as an expert, I know that ninety-nine out of a hundred of your race were strongly against the killing of witches when that foolishness was first agitated by a handful of pious lunatics in the long ago. And I know that even today, after ages of transmitted prejudice and silly teaching, only one person in twenty puts any real heart into the harrying of a witch. And yet apparently everybody hates witches and wants them killed. Someday a handful will rise up on the other side and make the most noise--perhaps even a single daring man with a big voice and a determined front will do it--and in a week all the sheep will wheel and follow him, and witch-hunting will come to a sudden end.

Monarchies, aristocracies, and religions are all based upon that large defect in your race--the individual's distrust of his neighbor, and his desire, for safety's or comfort's sake, to stand well in his neighbor's eye. These institutions will always remain, and always flourish, and always oppress you, and affront you, and degrade you, because you will always remain slaves of minorities. There was never a country where the majority of the people were in their secret hearts loyal to any of these institutions.

8

All these pictures harmonize with the doctrine of What Is Man? They represent men as they are in particular circumstances, but not as they need be. Even here the picture is not desperate--there is possibility for improvement; the stupidities are the result of "ages of transmitted prejudices and silly teaching." Remove the prejudices and alter the teaching, and the percentage will be no longer a mere one thinker out of a hundred. There is proof of this in the same works from which these deprecatory illustrations have been taken; there are lessons for the people, lessons for governments in caring for their peoples. There is no more inspiring story for one of humble origin than that of the Maid of Orleans. Does she rise in spite of her humble birth, her lowly position, her poverty? No, she rises because of them.

...She was a peasant. That tells the whole story. She was one of the people and knew the people; those others moved in a loftier sphere and knew nothing much about them. We make little account of that vague formless, inert mass, that mighty underlying force which we call 'the people'--an epithet which carries contempt with it. It is a strange attitude; for at bottom we know that the throne which the people support stands and when that support is removed nothing in this world can save it.

9

The people are not hopelessly damned by Mark Twain. Whenever he plays their stupid action, he holds them an example of energy and inspiration--one of their own--and says, "this one did it; why can't you?"

This didacticism pervades his entire works. The commonest of the "common people" may become a vital part of society. Take, for instance, old D'Arc, father of Joan. He, like so many others, has doubted his daughter's mission. After her victories he sees the heroic maid; he humbles himself and asks her forgiveness, unable to hold back his tears. And the Sieur de Conte philosophizes:

Do you see? Even that poor groping old land-crab, with his skull full of pulp, had pride. Isn't it wonderful? And more-- he had conscience; he had a sense of right and wrong, such as it was; he was able to feel remorse. It looks impossible, it looks incredible, but it is not. I believe that some day it will be found out that peasants are people. Yes, beings in a great many respects like ourselves. And I believe that some day they will find this out, too--and then! Well, then I think they will rise up and demand to be regarded as part of the race, and that by consequence there will be trouble. Whenever one sees in a book or in a king's proclamation those words "the nation," they bring before us the upper classes; only those; we know no other "nation"; for us and the kings no other "nation" exists. But from the day that I saw old D'Arc the peasant acting and feeling just as I should have acted and felt myself, I have carried the conviction in my heart that our peasants are not merely animals, beasts of burden put here by the good God to produce food and comfort for the "nation," but something more and better. You look incredulous. Well, that is your training; it is the training of everybody; but as for me, I thank that incident for giving me a better light, and I have never forgotten it.

10

What a remarkable attitude for a "pessimist." But no matter how one proceeds through the works of Mark Twain, if he is fair, he will find for every shadow of despair a corresponding ray of hope, and will feel that the shadow was cast purposely in order to give the light a better chance to do its office.

Up to this point in our survey of Mark Twain's social views, we have seen some of the "cruelties, vanities, arrogances, meannesses, and hypocrisies" of the human race which made the word civilization odious to Mark Twain's ears. But, to continue, there is another contributing factor--"a lot of artistic, intellectual, and other artificialities," which are all thought to be essential to civilization. Mark Twain hated sham. He was genuine himself, and he could detect the genuine in others. As an intellect, he mixed freely with the greatest minds of his day. He did not deprecate true artistry: he himself was an artist of first magnitude in the use of the American language; he educated at his own expense a young artist, a sculptor, in the best schools in France. Although he did not enjoy operatic music, he recognized its place in society and gave his daughter Susy every opportunity to cultivate her operatic talents. He admitted his own disinclination toward musical complexities, and even hinted at his limitation in understanding "high-brow" renditions. He loved music, and he knew the kind he loved: "It seems to me," he once said, "that the chief virtue in song is melody, air, tune, rhythm, or what you please to call it, and when that feature is absent what remains is a picture with the color left

out. I was not able to detect in the vocal parts of 'Parsifal' anything that might with confidence be called rhythm or tune or melody...." ¹¹

Yet, later, he enjoyed "Parsifal" and "supposed that his musical regeneration was accomplished and perfected," but the critics confused him by pronouncing this performance terrible. "Well," he said, "I ought to have recognized the sign--the old sure sign that has never failed me in matters of art. Whenever I enjoy anything in art it means that it is mighty poor." ¹² But he never pretended that he was left ecstatic over the performance of singers or actors he did not understand, and those who made such pretensions he ridiculed:

At the Metropolitan in New York the people sit in a glare, and wear their showiest harness; they hum airs, they squeak fans, they titter, and they gabble all the time. In some of the boxes the conversation and laughter are so loud as to divide the attention of the house with the stage. In large measure the Metropolitan is a show-case for rich fashionables who are not trained in Wagnerian music and have no reverence for it, but who like to promote art and show their clothes.

13

The sham of class distinctions was another social abuse that Mark Twain attacked. The old philosopher in What Is Man? taught that there are gold men, silver men, leaden, copper, brass men, and so on,

11

"The Shrine of St. Wagner," Works, XXVI, 214.

12

Ibid., p. 227.

13

Ibid., p. 225.

but that no one of them deserves any credit for the material out of which he happens to be made. But provided that each man is educated up to the limit of his material, the difference between them is negligible. Each moves in his own sphere, each performs his own task, and not only does not move in circles incompatible with his nature, but has no desire to mix with alien spirits. We learn from "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" that men are happiest when they are with their own kind. The Captain has to be instructed:

"Sandy," says I, "I had an idea that I was going to be equal with everybody here, too, but I will let that drop. It don't matter, and I am plenty happy enough."

"Captain, you are happier than you would be the other way. These old patriarchs and prophets have got ages the start of you; they know more in two minutes than you know in a year. Did you ever try to have a sociable improving time discussing winds and currents and variations of compass with an undertaker?"

"I got your idea, Sandy. He couldn't interest me. He would be an ignoramus in such things--he would bore me, and I would bore him."

14

It is obvious that Mark Twain recognized differences in men--differences in classes of men, but he did not believe that the accident of birth established any individual's superiority. In Pudd'nhead Wilson he has Tom Driscoll cry out: "Why were niggers and whites made? What

crime did the uncreated first nigger commit that the curse of birth was decreed for him? And why this awful difference made between black and white?" A river-pilot who had extended himself to the fullest possibilities of his nature was as praiseworthy as a statesman who had made his completest contribution. Both were necessary to the healthy life of the country. Such places or distinctions as there were in society, thus, were based on merit--the merit accruing from honest and diligent labor, not from the accident of birth. Without the show and display of royalty a King could not claim distinction over other men. This is illustrated by one of the most interesting descriptive scenes in the entire works of Mark Twain--the passage in The Prince and the Pauper wherein the English court wavered in their acceptance of a King. The coronation march was in progress; Tom Canty was about to be crowned King of England, but the real King stepped upon the platform and claimed his place. The only distinguishing feature between the two boys was that one was in purple robes, the other in rags. But when it seemed probable that the rags were royalty, there

began a movement of the gorgeous particles of that official group which was slow, scarcely perceptible, and yet steady and persistent--a movement such as is observed in a kaleidoscope that is turned slowly, whereby the components of one splendid cluster fall away and join themselves to another--a movement which, little by little, in the present case, dissolved the glittering crowd that stood about Tom Canty and clustered it together again in the neighborhood of the newcomer. Tom Canty stood almost alone. Now ensued a brief season of deep suspense and

waiting--during which even the few faint-hearts still remaining near Tom Cauty gradually scraped together courage enough to glide, one by one, over to the majority. So at last Tom Cauty, in his royal robes and jewels, stood wholly alone and isolated from the world, a conspicuous figure, occupying an eloquent vacancy.

15

This matter of the popular inability to identify kings when stripped of their royal garb appears often. King Arthur decided to go with Sir Boss on a tour of inspection throughout his realm. He must travel incognito, and the Yankee arranged the regal disguise. "When he got his lubberly sandals on, and his long robe of coarse brown linen cloth, which hung straight from his neck to his anklebones, he was no longer the comeliest man in his kingdom, but one of the unhandsomest and most commonplace and unattractive."

16

On another occasion the King and Sir Boss had been captured and made slaves. "We took up our line of march," writes the Yankee, "and passed out of Cambenet at noon; and it seemed to me unaccountably strange and odd that the King of England and his chief minister, marching manacled and fettered and yoked, in a slave convoy, could move by all manner of idle men and women, and under windows where sat the sweet and lovely, and yet never attract a curious eye, never provoke a single remark. Dear, dear, it only shows that there is nothing diviner about a King than there

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Works, XI, 254.

16

Works, XIV, 263.

is about a tramp, after all. He is just a cheap and hollow artificiality when you don't know he is a King. But reveal his quality, and dear me, it takes your very breath away to look at him. I reckon we are all fools. Born so, no doubt."¹⁷

And as is usually true, Mark Twain, in the same book, offered something better in the place of what he criticized. It will be recalled that he had established an educational system in Arthur's Kingdom and that he had been teaching patriotism, labor, and loyalty, but

You see [he says] my kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its office-holders. The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous, they are mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged, cease to be comfortable, cease to protect the body from winter, disease, and death. To be loyal to rags, to shout for rags, to worship rags, to die for rags--that is the loyalty of unreason, it is pure animal; it belongs to monarchy; let monarchy keep it. ...

18

A word needs to be said at this point about Mark Twain's views on monarchy. In Mr. DeVoto's recent edition of some heretofore unpublished works of Mark Twain, quite a prominent place is given to what appears to be Mark Twain's belief in monarchy. The book opens with

17

Ibid., p. 352.

18

Ibid., p. 107.

the following unqualified statement which seems to stamp Mark Twain as an enemy of democracy.

Monarchy - But it would come. Because of a special and particular reason? Yes. Two special reasons and one condition.

1. It is the nature of man to want a definite something to love, honor, reverently look up to, and obey: God and King, for example.
2. Little republics have lasted long, protected by their poverty and insignificance, but great ones have not.
3. The Condition: vast power and wealth, which breed commercial and political corruption and incite public favorites to dangerous ambitions.

19

This passage is thoroughly misleading as it is printed by Mr. DeVoto, for Mark Twain was not sympathetic toward monarchy; he did not desire it, nor did he believe in it. He feared that it would come. He knew history, and he saw the trend of events during Roosevelt's administration--the concentration of more and more power in the central government. He knew human weaknesses, and realized that what had happened to other civilizations could happen here, unless the people would take their part and act upon their prerogatives as free men. He had already (1887) voiced his hatred of monarchy:

 19

Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain in Eruption, pp. 1-2.

Unlimited power is the ideal thing when it is in safe hands. The despotism of heaven is the one absolutely perfect government. An earthly despotism would be the absolutely perfect earthly government, if the conditions were the same, namely, the despot the perfectest individual of the human race, and his lease of life perpetual. But as a perishable perfect man must die, and leave his despotism in the hands of an imperfect successor, an earthly despotism is not merely a bad form of government, it is the worst form that is possible.

20

In other words, Mark Twain preferred an enlightened people, however imperfect their rule might be, to a perfect monarch.

And we shall see presently Mark Twain's antidote for monarchy. Let us return for a moment to the matter of superfidial class distinctions. We have noticed in A Connecticut Yankee that the system of slavery in England called to Sir Boss's mind the condition of the Old South, and drew forth his caustic comment. But even if Mark Twain did occasionally go to remote places for his settings, still we must keep in mind that his method of instruction was laying traps for people. He entertained them first with a romantic tale and then depended upon the effect to produce its psychic rejuvenation. His lessons were more effective when they were hidden away in romance; they took the people whom he wished to instruct completely unaware; consequently the traps were more certain of their catch. He had observed that human nature

is pretty much the same everywhere; it mattered little where or when he laid his scene.

But not only did he attack the shams of society in Europe and in the Old South. He leveled his fire upon the false claims of certain classes in our nation's capital, where he had lived and moved and observed. The following account is taken from The Gilded Age:

Laura soon discovered that there were three distinct aristocracies in Washington. One of these (nicknamed the Antiques) consisted of cultivated, highbred old families who looked back with pride upon an ancestry that had always been great in the nation's councils and its wars from the birth of the republic downward. Into this select circle it was difficult to gain admission. No. 2 was the aristocracy of the middle ground--of which more will be said anon. No. 3 lay beyond; of it we will say a word here. We will call it the Aristocracy of the Parvenus--as, indeed, the general public did. Official position, no matter how obtained, entitled a man to a place in it, and carried his family with him, no matter whence they sprang. Great wealth gave a man a still higher and nobler place in it than did official position. If this wealth had been acquired by conspicuous ingenuity, with just a little spice of illegality about it, all the better. This aristocracy was not averse to ostentation. The aristocracy of the Antiques ignored the aristocracy of the Parvenus; the Parvenus laughed at the Antiques (and secretly envied them).

But the best aristocracy of the three Washington casts, and really the most powerful, by far, was that of the Middle Ground. It was made up of the families of public men from nearly every state in the Union--

men who held positions in both the executive and legislative branches of the government, and whose characters had been for years blemishless, both at home and at the capital. These gentlemen and their households were unostentatious people; they were educated and refined; they troubled themselves but little about the two other orders of nobility, but moved serenely in their wide orbit, confident of their own strength and well aware of the potency of their influence. They had no troublesome appearances to keep up, no rivalries which they cared to distress themselves about, no jealousies to fret over. They could afford to mind their own affairs and leave other combinations to do the same or do otherwise, just as they chose. They were people who were beyond reproach, and that was sufficient. 21

We have noticed so far two social abuses which provoked Mark Twain to condemnatory utterances: the unquestioned submission of the masses, and the unearned position of the classes. There is a third, which we shall glance at briefly, namely, the imperfect operation of some of the most highly-praised institutions of democracy.

Very early in his career as a journalist, Mark Twain became indignant over the malfeasance of the San Francisco police force. He attacked the winking policy which allowed members of one race to maltreat cruelly the members of another race. He spoke for humanity, but
22
his paper would not publish his article. He learned then that if a writer would lesson his readers, he must slip up on their blind side--

21

Works, VI, 9-10.

22

Works, XXX, 258.

he must set traps for people to teach them humanity. But before he established this method, he attempted again to criticize openly--to satirize. In The Gilded Age and in Roughing It he bitterly attacked the government for its high-handed treatment of honest citizens. "The government of my country snubs honest simplicity, but fondles artistic villainy."²³ In both works he ridiculed the incompetence of the jury system. The following story is boisterous, but it illustrates his method of attack. The scene is a courtroom. A jury is being impaneled. A man steps up; the attorney questions him:

"Avery Kicks, peanut-peddler. Did you ever hear of this case?" The man shook his head.

"Can you read?"

"No."

"Any scruples about capital punishment?"

"No."

He was about to be sworn in, when the district attorney, turning to him, carelessly remarked:

"Understand the nature of an oath?"

"Outside," said the man pointing to the door.

"I say, do you know what an oath is?"

"Five cents," explained the man.

"Do you mean to insult me?" roared the prosecuting officer. "Are you an idiot?"

"Fresh baked. I'm deaf. I don't hear a word you say."

The man was discharged. "He wouldn't have made a bad juror, though," whispered Braham. "I saw him looking at the prisoner sympathizingly. That's a point you want to watch for."

It was four weary days before this jury was made up, but when it was finally complete, it did great credit to the counsel for the defense.

So far as Mr. Braham knew, only two could read, one of whom was the foreman, Mr. Braham's friend, the showy contractor. Low foreheads and heavy faces they all had; some had a look of criminal cunning, while the most were only stupid. The entire panel formed that boasted heritage commonly described as the 'bulwark of our liberties.' 24

The jury system, he explains in Roughing It, was invented by Alfred the Great. At that time it called for men who could read, but that was in a day when only the most favored and fortunate could read; therefore, the juries of Alfred's day were made up pretty generally of intelligent men. But in our day, the most enlightened citizens did all they could to escape jury service and left the business to those who could read--perhaps barely read, as in the jury described above. Why, Mark Twain wants to know,

Why could not the jury be so altered as to give men of brains and honesty an equal chance with fools and miscreants? Is it

right to show the present favoritism to one class of men and inflict a disability on another, in a land whose boast is that all its citizens are free and equal? I am a candidate for the legislature. I desire to tamper with the jury law. I wish to so alter it as to put a premium on intelligence and character, and close the jury-box against idiots, blacklegs, and people who do not read the newspapers. But no doubt I shall be defeated--every effort I make to save the country misses fire.

25

In spite of the comments of Professors Pattee and Cargill to the contrary, The Gilded Age is filled with social protest and with satire on conditions for which there was an actual basis in fact. We may note an example or two. From The Gilded Age we read:

The Hon. Mrs. Oliver Higgins was the wife of a delegate from a distant territory--a gentleman who had kept the principal "saloon," and sold the best whiskey in the principal village in his wilderness, and so, of course, was recognized as the first man of his commonwealth and its fittest representative. ...The Hon. Higgins had not come to serve his country in Washington for nothing. The appropriation which he had engineered through Congress for the maintenance of the Indians in his territory would have made all those savages rich if it had ever got to them.

26

And from the pages of history:

The Whiskey Ring scandal still hung in the sky like a waning moon when there began

 25

Ibid., p. 58.

26

Works, IV., 16.

to be talk of another exposure. This time it centered upon W. A. Belknap, the secretary of War. He had a goodlooking, expensively dressed wife who drove around in a splendid carriage. As the Belknaps were not people of wealth, everyone wondered how they contrived to make such a show on his salary. Then the truth came out; at any rate, part of it. Mrs. Belknap, acting presumably for her husband, had been accepting graft from the post traders on the Indian reservations. The trading posts were mercantile monopolies, which means that the official trader was the only merchant allowed to do business on the reservation to which he was assigned. The appointment of traders was in the hands of the Secretary of War.

27

Obviously Mark Twain is dealing with history. Such satire as we find in The Gilded Age is not, as is usually the case, directed against the institution which practices corruption or takes advantage of human liberties, but against the men and the women who allow institutions to usurp their privileges--the "damned human race" that will elect a Dilworthy, that will guzzle "yellow journalism," that will allow maudlin sympathy to acquit a murdererss, that will cling slavishly to a jury system that was effective at the time it was instituted by Alfred the Great. Mark Twain's satire is sensible. It does not blame corrupt institutions. They are inanimate. He does not condemn the founders and practitioners of corruption. They are as nature made them. But he does cry out against the dupes, himself included, who are repeatedly taken in by the corrupt, and then incomprehensibly turn to make demagogues out of those who deceived them.

 27

W. E. Woodward, A New American History (New York: 1937), pp. 622-623.

In The Gilded Age, immediately after the unsuccessful attempt of the righteous to oust Senator Dilworthy, there was passed in the Senate "an ingenious measure contrived by the General from Massachusetts whereby the President's salary was proposed to be doubled and every Congressman paid several thousand dollars for work previously done,²⁸ under an accepted contract, and already paid for once and receipted."

And in the history book: "On the last day of the next session of Congress a rider which raised salaries all around was attached to the general appropriation bill. The salary of the President was lifted from \$25,000 to \$50,000 a year. Senators and Representatives got a boost from \$5,000 to \$7,500. There was no objection to that, but Congress spoiled it all by making the measure retroactive, so that its beneficiaries might draw the increased pay for the past two years. This wonderful piece of legislation is known in history as the Back Pay Grab."²⁹

So we see at least some of the causes of Mark Twain's caustic utterances against humanity—stupid submission, animal loyalty, uncontested superiority, unearned merit, sham society, artificial claims to perfection. Is the attack contained in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" directed against any other abuses than those here enumerated?

²⁸

Works, VI, 290. The italics are mine.

²⁹

Woodward, op. cit., p. 619.

But there is another side to this matter, which shows how Mark Twain would improve the social group. We have already glimpsed something of his ideal in part of the letter to Twichell: "happiness, food, shelter, clothing, wholesome labor, modest and rational ambitions, honesty, kindness, hospitality, love of freedom and limitless courage to fight for it, composure and fortitude in time of disaster, patience in time of hardships and privation, absence of noise and brag in time of victory, contentment with an humble and peaceful life void of insane excitements--if there is a higher and better form of civilization than this," he says, "I am not aware of it." This was the peace and simplicity he found in the Sandwich Islands. It was the peace and simplicity he found in Europe years later when he described "The Cradle of Liberty."

This [he wrote of Switzerland] is a good atmosphere to be in, morally as well as physically. After trying the political atmosphere of the neighboring monarchies, it is healing and refreshing to breathe in air that has known no taint of slavery for six hundred years, and to come among a people whose political history is great and fine, and worthy to be taught in all schools and studied by all races and peoples. For the struggle here throughout the centuries has not been in the interest of any private family, or any church, but in the interest of the whole body of the nation, and for shelter and protection of all forms of belief. This fact is colossal. If one would realize how colossal it is, and of what dignity and majesty, let him contrast it with the purposes and objects of the Crusades, the siege of York, the War of the Roses, and other historic comedies of that sort and size. 30

It seems strange that an idealist of this stamp is not listed among the writers of Utopian novels. There was a surprising number of such idealists in Mark Twain's day--men who formulated schemes for a simple but perfectly coordinated society. ³¹ Had Clemens attacked and offered no solution, the absence of his name among the Utopians would be more easily understandable. But a comparison between an accredited Utopian novel and one of Mark Twain's works reveals a close parallel and suggests that the omission is an oversight.

The framework of these novels varies little: a visitant from some other sphere chances to arrive on earth, or an earthman wakes from a phenomenal sleep, mesmerically or otherwise imposed, and, noticing differences between his new situation and the one he has left, he chronicles them supposedly for the benefit of human kind. As a matter of interest, and not inappropriate to this discussion, let us take what appears to be the best of the Utopian novels, Bellamy's Looking Backward, and essay a comparison between the adventures and observations of its chief character, Julian West, and those of Hank Morgan, the Sir Boss of A Connecticut Yankee.

31

"In American letters," writes Allyn B. Forbes, ("The Literary Quest for Utopia," Social Forces [Dec. 1927], VI, 180), "there appears to be at least one comer, that of Utopian novels, which has been passed over practically unheeded. Here and there a cursory reference to Edward Bellamy or to W. D. Howells' venture in this type of literature sums up what has been said on this subject. ...It was in the mid-eighties that the main stream appeared, assuming large proportions in the nineties." In his interesting discussion and its accompanying bibliography, Mr. Forbes mentions some twenty or thirty books between 1880 and 1890 that deal with the metamorphoses of the world into a dreamed existence of perfection.

West, the mesmerized Bostonian who slept for one hundred and thirteen years, described for people of the year 2000 the civilization of 1887. Society, he said, was like a huge coach, drawn up hill through thick sand by the masses of humanity. The driver was Hunger, who relentlessly plied the lash to prevent lagging. The top of the coach was spacious, and afforded the passengers a pleasant, if somewhat precarious situation, for at each turn or hump, the swaying of the conveyance would hurl some of the riders down to earth, where they would lose their identity as riders and be forced to pull the carriage or struggle for footing to regain its top. There was a strange hallucination "which those on top of the coach generally shared, that they were not exactly like their brothers and sisters who pulled at the rope. ...The strangest thing about the hallucination was that those who had just climbed up from the ground, before they had outgrown the marks of the rope upon their hands, began to fall under its influence. As for those whose parents and grandparents before them had been so fortunate as to keep their seats on the top, the conviction they cherished of the essential difference between their sort of humanity and the common article was absolute."

False claim to class distinction, notice, is the object of comment, just as we have seen it in Mark Twain. And Twain is even more specific:

³²
Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1887), p. 13.

I had an...interest [writes Hank Morgan] which had never paled for me since I had been in Arthur's Kingdom; the behavior... of chance passers-by toward each other. Toward the shaven monk who trudged along with his cowl tilted back and the sweat washing down his fat jowls, the coal-burner was deeply reverent; to the gentleman he was abject; with the small farmer and the free mechanic he was cordial and gossipy; and when a slave passed by with a countenance respectfully lowered, this chap's nose was in the air--he couldn't even see him. Well, there are times when one would like to hang the whole human race and finish the farce.

33

The two authors, then, started out with similar theses, the ill-founded claims of class distinction. But whereas Bellamy considered money as the source of this evil, and tried to correct it in his novel by abolishing capital, Mark Twain recognized a deeper principle underlying the evil, attributing it to inherited traditions and false thinking, and as a corrective, established a system for training human ideals upward and still upward. He appeals to history to prove his contention that the man who is superior is the man who can produce. "The master minds of all nations, in all ages," he says "have sprung in affluent multitude from the mass of the nation, and from the mass of the nation only--not from its privileged classes; ...even the best governed and most free and most enlightened monarchy is still behind the best condition attainable by its people."³⁴ His whole philosophy is devoted to waking the people to a consciousness of their potentialities.

33

Works, XIV, 298.

34

Ibid., p. 237.

Our comparison suggests eight points that are common to the dream world of Julian West and the manufactured civilization of the aggressive Yankee, Hank Morgan. Let us examine them.

Sir Boss has been working persistently at his three-year civilization program. He summarizes his accomplishments: "Consider three years sped. Now look around on England. A happy and prosperous country, and strangely altered. Schools everywhere, and several colleges; a number of pretty good newspapers. ...Slavery was dead and gone; all men were equal before the law; taxation had been equalized. The telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph, the typewriter, the sewing machine, and all the thousand willing and handy servants of steam and electricity were working their way into favor. ...There was hardly a knight in all the land who wasn't in some useful employment. ...You see, I had two schemes in my head which were the vastest of all my projects. The one was to overthrow the Catholic Church ³⁵ and set up the Protestant faith on its ruins--not as an Established Church, but a go-as-you-please one; and the other project was to get a decree issued, by and by, commanding that upon Arthur's death unlimited suffrage should be introduced, and given to men and women alike. ..."

35

It might be said here that Mark Twain's objection to the Catholic Church was based upon the idea that as an institution it had kept humanity enslaved in ignorance for centuries. His wide reading in history taught him to hate any individual or organization that wittingly or unwittingly contributed to the curtailment of human liberties. He himself was no more sympathetic toward one religion than another, and would have condemned Protestantism as heartily and as frankly had he felt that history justified his condemnation.

Here is a summary of the ideals that are common to Bellamy's world of 2000 and Mark Twain's three-year plan:

1. Absence of all forms of slavery
2. Universal equality of opportunity
3. Parity of taxation
4. Useful employment for all
5. Freedom of worship
6. Universal manhood suffrage; woman suffrage
7. Governmental revolution without bloodshed
8. Spirit of emulation kept alive through physical exercise.

Whether these eight points of contact establish Mark Twain as a Utopian or not is of little importance. But this comparison between Looking Backward and A Connecticut Yankee does show that the aims of Bellamy and Clemens were similar, that their results were almost identical, and that their common ideal was to improve mankind by the elimination of needless evil. The chief difference between the books appears to be that, whereas the Bostonian waked to find his new world all made to order, the Connecticut Yankee built his by a fierce energy, a keen wit, and common sense. For the building of it he chose his men carefully, from prisons, from slave chains, from farms, or from the court. He required two qualities: ability to think and strength to act. Here is his method of enlisting a recruit:

The newest prisoner's crime was a mere remark that he had made. He said he believed that men were about all alike, and one man was as good as another, barring

clothes. He said he believed that if you were to strip the nation naked and send a stranger through the crowd, he couldn't tell the king from a quack doctor, nor a duke from a hotel clerk. Apparently here was a man whose brains had not been reduced to an ineffectual mush by idiotic training.

36

And he sent the man whom he redeemed to one of his industrial plants. He always judged the man, whether he came from prison or from court. He could use the king himself, for

the fact is, the king was a good deal more than a king; he was a man; and when a man is a man, you can't knock it out of him. I will only remark that at the end of a week there was plenty of evidence that lash and club and fist had done their work well; the king's body was a sight to see--and to weep over; but his spirit?--why, it wasn't even phased. Even that dull clod of a slave-driver was able to see that there can be such a thing as a slave who will remain a man till he dies; whose bones you can break but whose manhood you can't.

37

Mark Twain's ideal society, then, was a society of men--men, the product of the system of training which he formulated in What Is Man?

This is Mark Twain's theory of society. We have seen the imperfections that caused his protests--we have seen his system for remedying the diseases which result in imperfection. We have noted that

36

Works, XIV, 157.

37

Ibid., p. 355.

in his writing on social matters there is a pretty even balance between the bitter and the pleasant, that the bitter is called forth by abuse of the rights of man; that in preparing a system for the rectification of human wrongs he turned the bitter into a pleasantness that was characteristic of his own soul.

We must look now at another kind of abuse which inspired loud vituperations from Mark Twain, for religions, as well as social abuse, provoked condemnatory utterances against the human race. As he stood for a simple, rational society, so he stood for simple, rational religion.

CHAPTER V

THE THEORY OF RELIGION

It has been suggested earlier in this study that almost every condemnatory utterance Mark Twain made regarding the human race was provoked by one of two things: social injustice or religious prejudice. An examination of his writings will support the suggestion. Mark Twain was avowedly concerned about the welfare and improvement of mankind. He outlined a system of training which could bring the individual to the fullest realization of his powers. Of that system, the most important feature is the removal of "inherited prejudicial ore"--anything that stands between man and his complete development. Now Mark Twain had observed in his study of history that the institutions of society and those of religion had more frequently than not placed upon man's mind restrictive influences which prohibited its potential fruition. Hence his hatred of the superficial claims of society as a civilizing agency; hence his animadversion to formal religion as a moral force. Religion, as he had observed it, planted seeds of prejudice and nourished their growth; religion, therefore, did not and could not do what it professed.

We have noticed in the preceding chapter, in the indictment which Satan pronounced against the race, that Christians had introduced gun-powder into warfare, had become the most effective killers in the history of mankind, and had conducted brutal inquisitions and bloody Crusades--all in the name of the Savior of Mankind. Christianity, therefore,--not its principles, but the institution--had failed as a benevolent factor in human progress. We shall observe as we progress in our examination of Mark Twain's comments on religion that his attack is consistently centered against institutions: against parenthood for teaching falsehood; against schools and Sunday-schools for their emphasis upon ritual and form rather than upon human ethics; against the church for subordinating the teachings of Jesus to the homiletics of theologians and scholars. These institutions turn thoughtful action into instinctive action, but according to Mark Twain's philosophy, real men should not act upon instinct. When men become loyal to petrified opinions, to traditional forms and ceremonies, to parties or to churches, they forfeit their independence. He himself did not and would not identify himself with any institution, religious or otherwise, loyalty to which would take precedence over his loyalty to man.

He sincerely believed that the strength of a democracy lies in its variety of interests, and in the freedom with which it allows each individual to follow his own interests. And so, Mark Twain declared in 1906: "I have never belonged to any church from that day [1865-1866] to this. I have remained absolutely free in such matters. And in this

independence I have found a spiritual comfort and a peace of mind quite¹ above price." But he also saw that American democracy was losing its force because of the too solid crystallization of worship, with the resulting degeneration into pure formality. When the famous Russian revolutionist Tchaykovsky called on Mark Twain during his visit to America, "expecting to arouse a conflagration of noble sympathy in our vast nation of eighty millions of happy and enthusiastic freemen," Mark had to "pour cold water down his crater." "I told him what I believed to be true: that our Christianity which we have always been so proud of--not to say vain of--is nothing but a shell, a sham, a hypocrisy."²

He sensed the shallowness of religion in America, and he knew that to most people, religion had become an inherited something, not a reasoned study. Let us take up again the conversation between the disputants of What Is Man? The Old Man speaks: "You have seen Presbyterians?"

Y. M. Many.

O. M. How did they happen to be Presbyterians and not Congregationalists? And why were the Congregationalists not Baptists, and the Baptists Roman Catholics, and the Roman Catholics Buddhists, and the Buddhists Quakers, and the Quakers Episcopalians, and the Episcopalians Millerites and the

¹ Autobiography, Works, XXXVII, 15.

² Ibid., p. 392.

Millerites Hindoos, and the Hindoos Atheists, and the Atheists Spiritualists, and the Spiritualists Agnostics, and the Agnostics Methodists, and the Methodists Confucians, and the Confucians Unitarians, and the Unitarians Mohammedans, and the Mohammedans Salvation Warriors, and the Salvation Warriors Zoroastrians, and the Zoroastrians Christian Scientists, and the Christian Scientists Mormons--and so on?

Y. M. You may answer your question yourself.

O. M. That list of sects is not a record of studies, searchings, seekings after light; it mainly (and sarcastically) indicates what association can do. If you know a man's nationality you can come within a split hair of guessing the complexion of his religion: English--Protestant; American--ditto; Spaniard, Frenchman, Irishman, Italian, South American, Austrian--Roman Catholic; Turk--Mohammedan; and so on. And when you know the man's religious complexion, you know what sort of books he reads when he wants some more light, and what sort of books he avoids, lest by accident he get more light than he wants. ...

3

The charge is clear. Not only is religion a matter of prejudicial association to begin with; it even closes a man's mind to that which might be better for his body and for his soul. The church as an institution, Mark Twain believed, has bred intolerance, even in a country whose origin was predicated upon tolerance. His friend and intimate, Joseph Twichell, pastor of the Episcopal Church in Concord, had voted on

³
Works, XXVI, 43-44.

one occasion contrary to the dictates of the party to which most of his parishioners belonged, and as a result came very near to losing his pastorate. In spite of the fact that Twichell had voted for the better man, the compulsion he was under required him to remain loyal to the institution. And we may expect that such an incident brought forth an outburst from Mark Twain:

There are certain sweet-smelling, sugar-coated lies current in the world which all politic men have apparently tacitly conspired to support and perpetuate. One is that there is such a thing in the world as independence, ...another is that there is such a thing as toleration, in religion, in politics, and such matters, and that toleration is admired and applauded.

4

Now Mark Twain did not merely preach toleration; he practiced it himself. He believed that Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon was a hoax; yet he vindicated the right of the Mormons to worship as they saw fit; he admired their remarkable energy in braving the wilderness to establish a place in which they might worship unmolested. He investigated Christian Science for himself, and although he was convinced that Science and Health was not divinely inspired, but was man-made, as the multitudinous errors and corrections of successive editions proved, although he saw that Christian Science had spread throughout the country simply because of the remarkable business perception of Mrs. Eddy, and although he went to some lengths to expose the human weakness of the

 4

Autobiography, XXXVII, 8.

alleged divinity, yet he encouraged the Scientists in their work for the good he knew they could do. He allowed the practitioners to visit his own family. He hoped even that this new sect could do what others had failed to do, that is, teach its members to practice the same morals on week days that they learned from their religious teachers on Sundays.

The present Christianity [he writes] makes an excellent private Christian, but its endeavors to make an excellent public one go for nothing, substantially.

This is an honest nation--in private life. The American Christian is a straight and clean and honest man, and in his private commerce with his fellows can be trusted to stand, faithfully by the principles of honor and honesty imposed on him by his religion. But the moment he comes forward to exercise a public trust he can be confidentially counted upon to betray that trust in nine cases out of ten, if 'party loyalty' shall require it. ...

Our Congress consists of Christians. In their private life they are true to every obligation of honor; yet in every session they violate them all, and do it without shame. ...

Now then, can Christian Science introduce the Congressional Blush? ...Can Christian Science persuade the nation and Congress to throw away their public morals and use none but their private ones henceforth in all their activities, both public and private?

I do not think so; but no matter about me: there is a field--a grand one, a splendid one, a sublime one, and absolutely unoccupied. ...Make the effort, Christian

Science; it is a most noble cause, and it might succeed.

5

And Mark Twain would have made the same proposition to any sect or party or creed which could show promise of bettering human morals and helping the human race. He recognized the need of worship. He knew that some kind of religion was necessary for the masses of humanity. But his ideal was that each man should give his religion some thought--that it should be a matter of study, of investigation, of seeking after light. Such a religious program was instituted by Sir Boss in King Arthur's realm.

Everybody could be any kind of Christian he wanted to; there was to be perfect freedom in that matter. ...I could have given my own sect the preference and made everybody a Presbyterian without any trouble, but that would have been to affront a law of human nature: spiritual wants and instincts are as various in the human family as are physical appetites, complexions, and features, and a man is only at his best, morally, when he is equipped with the religious garment whose color and shape and size most nicely accommodate themselves to the stature of the individual who wears it; and besides, I was afraid of a united church; it makes a mighty power, the mightiest conceivable, and then when it by and by gets into selfish hands, as it is always bound to do, it means death to human liberty and paralysis to human thought.

6

⁵ Christian Science, Works, XXV, 262-64.

⁶ Works, XIV, 77.

And we know from the sequel what it was that prevented Sir Boss's program from the success promised by its auspicious beginnings. The Church, playing on men's superstition, had taken advantage of Sir Boss's absence to destroy all his progress and place the people under the interdict.

We have seen in a general way the bases of Mark Twain's objection to formal religion. Suppose we enter more into details: let us examine some of the specific aspects of religion which he found prejudicial to man's advancement.

In the passage quoted above from A Connecticut Yankee, Sir Boss explains that he refrained from making Presbyterian proselytes out of all his subjects because "a united church makes a mighty power...and when it gets into selfish hands, as it is always bound to do, it means death to human liberty and paralysis to human thought." We have heard Mark Twain uttering these same maxims in propria persona. As we have noticed, he believed that the strength of democracy lies in its variety of interests and in the freedom it allows the individual to follow his own interests. Is this variety of interest and this freedom possible in a nation dominated by one church? It will be recalled that his chief objection to monarchy was that despotic power had always fallen eventually into unworthy hands. He had warned his countrymen that monarchy would come to America on the "Condition" that one party secured for itself sufficient power and wealth to incite men to ambition. These beliefs and fears did not derive from mere guesses and conjecture. Mark Twain was

an apt student of history. He had seen what had happened whenever a party or a church had appropriated too much authority. He was opposed to an Established United Church—why? The reason is historical:

In two or three centuries it had converted a nation of men to a nation of worms. Before the day of the Church's supremacy in the world, men were men, and held their heads up, and had a man's pride and spirit and independence; and what of greatness and position a person got, he got mainly by achievement, not by birth. But then the Church came to the front, with an ax to grind; and she was wise, subtle, and knew more than one way to skin a cat—or a nation; she invented 'divine right' of things; and propped it all around, brick by brick, with the Beatitudes—wrenching them from their good purpose to make them fortify an evil one; she preached (to the commoner) humility, obedience to superiors, the beauty of self sacrifice; she preached (to the commoner) meekness under insult; preached (still to the commoner, always to the commoner) patience, meanness of spirit, nonresistance under oppression; and she introduced heritable ranks and taught all the Christian populations of the earth to bow down to them and worship them. ...

7

This attack upon the Established Church is not peculiar to Mark Twain's old age, his "bitter" years, as they have been called. His laughter at people for allowing themselves to be duped dates as far back as the very first book he wrote, The Innocents Abroad. Many have considered him sacrilegious in the Holy Land, but there is much common sense back of his iconoclastic attitude. Witness the occasion of his visit to

⁷
Ibid., pp. 64-65.

Rome. Mark Twain is at the Vatican. He has toured the city, has seen the places of interest, the places famous in history. He has observed and noted, and occasionally objected. What are his feelings, his thoughts as he stands in this holy place, the center of a great religion, said to have been founded by Christ himself? Will Mark Twain be facetious? We shall see for ourselves:

In all seriousness [he says], without meaning to be frivolous--without meaning to be irreverent, and more than all, without meaning to be blasphemous--I state as my simple deduction from the things I have seen and the things I have heard, that the Holy Personages rank thus in Rome:

First - 'The Mother of God'--otherwise the Virgin Mary.

Second - The Deity.

Third - Peter.

Fourth - Some twelve or fifteen canonized Popes and martyrs.

Fifth - Jesus Christ the Savior--(but always as an infant in Arms.)

8

Obviously this is not one of Mark Twain's impertinences. This classification he made in all seriousness of thought, and yet the sting at the end does add a peculiar, odd bit of humor. But however we accept this commentary on the Holy Personages, can we not safely infer that it presents an inversion of the ranks as Mark Twain thinks they should be--that according to him, the Savior of the world should by every right take

precedence over all the others, save only the Deity? At this early date Mark Twain took his stand as the individual against the institution, the institution that would subordinate the greatest humanitarian who ever lived to a position of relative unimportance, behind the man-made saints and divinities of the Established Church.

Let us pause long enough in this discussion of the features of formal religion which Mark Twain found objectionable to take cognizance of his apparent attitude toward Christ. The passage cited above leads us to believe that Jesus should rank first, or at least second among Holy Personages, and that he would be better represented as a man doing good than as a babe in arms. According to William Dean Howells, Mark Twain did not accept the Biblical account of the divinity of Jesus, for he could not believe the theories of parthenogenesis and physical regeneration. In 1878 he wrote: "Neither Howells nor I believe in hell or the divinity of the Savior, but no matter, the Savior is none the less a sacred Personage, and a man should have no desire or disposition to refer to him lightly, profanely, or otherwise than with the profoundest reverence."⁹ The rejection of Jesus as divine, we see, did not alter his admiration for the Son of Man. "There has been only one Christian,"¹⁰ he wrote in his Notebook. "They caught Him and crucified him early." And we know from our survey of Mark Twain's thought that many of its

⁹
Letters, Works, XXXIV, 323

¹⁰
Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 344.

simple rules of humanity are in harmony with the simple utterances of the Sermon on the Mount.

The numerous analogies between the life of Joan of Arc as Mark Twain narrated it and the life of Jesus strike me as remarkable. Perhaps the parallels are nothing more than coincidences, but at times it seems that Mark Twain is writing the incredible story of the Maid in order to give credence to the unbelievable account of the Nazarene, the inference being that if history supports the facts of the one, the other will not be so hard to believe. The first hint of this is in de Conte's preface:

I came to comprehend and recognize her
at last for what she was--the most noble
life that was ever born into the world
save only One.

11

Then, the narrator goes on to unfold the history, employing scenes, events, and even phraseology that recall similar incidents in the life of Jesus. For example, we are told that Jesus lost his temper once during his ministry, and only once. There is one loss of temper in the life of the Maid. Christ is made to appear before the Pharisees; Joan defends herself against the learned doctors. It was the descent of something resembling a dove that announced the Commission of Jesus to the people at the baptismal scene in the river Jordan; it was the miraculous recognition of the disguised King that gave Joan her commission

 11

Joan of Arc, Works, XVII. xxviii. The italics are mine.

to carry on her appointed business. Christ walked through the rank and file of men, choosing his disciples from among the high and the lowly; Joan chose her helpers in the same way. Christ saw fit to cleanse the temple, where his work was to be done; Joan ordered a cleaning of the camp, the place where she was to do her work. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead; Joan saved to life the Dwarf, who said,¹² "for I was dead, and am alive again." In the scriptural account, Judas betrayed his friend; in Joan of Arc, Loyselleur betrayed the Maid. Judas, stricken with remorse, hanged himself; the stricken priest went raging mad. One of the last utterances of Christ was, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." These same words fall from the lips of the dying girl.

Now we do not know whether or not Mark Twain, in his composition of the Recollections was consciously drawing analogies. It makes little difference, after all. The point is this: Mark Twain had a heartfelt sympathy and a genuine love for this girl who gave her life to save her people; but admiration, mere admiration, was all he could muster for Jesus, and his admiration was for the human qualities, not the divine. In the Notebook, under an entry written at sea in 1896, there is the following account:

The sermon yesterday morning had in it one of those old timers—one of those sillinesses--which the pulpit used to get

¹²

Ibid., pp. 223-4.

eloquent over very frequently: Christ gave His life for our race. Could a man be found who would do such a thing? Millions of men and millions of women have done more; they have freely given their lives to save even individuals who were in danger--and risked eternal damnation when they did it; for they rushed to the rescue without first squaring up their sin account with God. Every volunteer in the army offers his life to save his country or his country's honor, and does it on the chance that his death may land him in hell, not on the great white throne, which was Christ's sure destination. For men to throw their lives away for other people's sake is one of the commonest events in our everyday history. It is ludicrous to see the Church make something fine out of the only instance of it where nothing was risked that was of consequence, for nothing was involved but a few hours of pain; and every girl takes a risk superior to that when she marries and subjects herself to the probable pains of childbirth, indefinitely repeated.

There seems to be nothing connected with the atonement scheme that is rational. If Christ was God, He is in the attitude of One whose anger against Adam has grown so uncontrollable in the course of ages that nothing but a sacrifice of life can appease it, and so without noticing how illogical the act is going to be, God condemns himself to death--commits suicide on the cross, and in this ingenious way wipes off the old score. It is said that the ways of Gods are not like ours. Let us not contest this point.

If Christ was God, then the Crucifixion is without dignity. It is merely ridiculous, for to endure several hours' pain is nothing heroic in God, in any case.

13

13

Mark Twain's Notebook, pp. 289-290. The objection, notice, is based upon what he considered the irrational belief in the divinity of Jesus.

It is noticeable that the most serious fault Mark Twain found with Mrs. Eddy in his investigation of Christian Science was the fact that she made herself the equal of Jesus. His resentment at such presumption is clear:

Here we have one Accuser, one Witness, one Judge, one Headsman--and all four bunched together in Mrs. Eddy, the inspired of God, His Latest Thought to His People, New Member of the Holy Trinity, the Equal of Jesus.

14

And presently he repeats her claims of equality with Jesus, and then contrasts the action of the two--the pretentious savior and the Biblical Savior:

As a picturesquely and persistently interesting personage, there is no mate to Mrs. Eddy, the accepted equal of the Savior. But some of her tastes are so different from His! I find it quite impossible to imagine Him, in life, standing sponsor for the Museum there, and taking pleasure in its sumptuous shows. I believe He would put that Chair in the fire, and the bell along with it; and I think He would make the show-woman go away. I think He would break those electric bulbs, and the 'mantle-piece of pure onyx,' and say reproachful things about the golden drain pipes of the lavatory, and give the costly rug of duck-breasts to the poor, and sever the satin ribbon and invite the weary to rest and ease their aches in the consecrated chairs.

 14

Works, XXV, 179-180.

What He would do with the painted windows
we can better conjecture when we come presently to examine their peculiarities.

15

Such a comparison, with its praise of simplicity and loving kindness all on the side of the Christ, is significant. It is the unpretentious, unadorned, unostentatious, human character that appeals to Mark Twain. The man must be of the people, but must not be bound by popular traditions. "In the whole history of the race of men no single great and high and beneficent thing was ever done for the souls and bodies, the hearts and brains, of the children of this world, but a mugwump [i.e. an independent] started it and mugwumps carried it to victory. And their names are the stateliest in history: Washington, Garrison,
16
Galileo, Luther, Christ."

Let us pass on to the second feature of organized religion which Mark Twain found objectionable. That feature was the popular conception of God--the God that was taught and preached to him during his childhood. The church and Sunday-school fostered a belief in a conscious, punitive divinity--a wrathful, vengeful long-beard who delighted in frightening small boys with thunder and threats of Hell, who sent electrical disturbances in order to whip into line small boys for going swimming on Sundays, or for smoking coffee behind the barn. This kind of teaching was not

15

Works, XXV, 179-180.

16

"Consistency," Speeches, Works, XXVIII, 130.

conducive to wholesome morality. We have seen in the analysis of What Is Man? that Mark Twain's system had as its advantage over other systems the performance of right for one's own sake; this matter of scaring souls into the Kingdom of God was false, both to God and to man. He recognized the effects such teachings had on his own mind. The evidence indicates that as a boy he was encouraged in the belief that the Lord had taken Mr. Clemens in order to bring little Sam to his senses. The forces of salvation have scored many a victory with that one, and if Sam's grief at the coffin-side of his father, his promise to do anything--except go to school--is any indication, the method was used on him. Describing this time of his life, he wrote later:

...It sounds curiously innocent and conceited now, but to me there was nothing strange about Providence sending storms and death to beguile me to a better life. It was quite in accordance with the thoughtful and judicial ways of Providence as I understood them. It would not have surprised me, nor ever over-flattered me, if Providence had killed off that whole community in trying to save an asset like me. Educated as I had been, it would have seemed just the thing, and well worth the expense. Why Providence should take such an anxious interest in such a property, that idea never entered my head, and there was no one in that simple hamlet who would have dreamed of putting it there. For one thing, no one was equipped with it.

17

The result of such teaching on childish minds is twofold: first, it prompts a spirit of daring--the child is not caught, therefore he is

not punished; and second it makes morality a matter of degree. I shall illustrate. Mark Twain is recollecting the events of his childhood.

"The news of the death of Injun Joe," he remembers

...reached me at a most unhappy time--that is to say, just at bedtime on a summer night when a prodigious storm of thunder and lightning accompanied by a deluging rain that turned the streets and lanes into rivers caused me to repent and resolve to lead a better life. ...By my teaching I perfectly well knew what all that wild rumpus was for--Satan had come to get Injun Joe. ...With every glare of lightning I shriveled and shrank together in mortal terror, and in the interval of black darkness that followed I poured out my lamentings over my lost condition, and my supplications for just one more chance, with an energy and feeling of sincerity quite foreign to my nature.

But in the morning I saw that it was a false alarm, and concluded to resume business at the old stand and wait for another reminder.

18

This careless morality--"to resume business at the old stand and wait for another reminder"--was the result of a Careless Deity.

Next, the boys were taught that there was one God, or Providence, who took a personal interest in the youth of the town; He was all good, not divisible, and was opposed to all evil. But in Huck Finn's mind there was something irreconcilable between the conception of Providence

as held by the Widow Douglas, for example, and that held by Miss Watson. "Sometimes," the boy declared,

The widow would take me aside and talk about Providence in a way to make a body's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again. I judged I could see there was two Providences, and a poor chap would stand considerable show with the widow's Providence, but if Miss Watson's got him there warn't no help for him any more. I thought it all out, and reckoned I would belong to the widow's if he wanted me, though I couldn't make out how he was agoin to be any better off then than he was before, seeing I was so ignorant, and so kind of low-down and ornery.

19

The same confusion arises in the mind of Theodor Fischer when he observes contradictory opinions among the priests who lead in different directions people worshipping the same God. In the little town there were two priests, Father Adolf and Father Peter. "But it was Father Peter," Theodor explains,

...that we all loved best and were sorriest for. Some people charged him with talking around in conversation that God was all goodness and would find a way to save all his poor human children. It was a horrible thing to say, but there was never any absolute proof that Father Peter said it; and it was out of character for him to say it, too, for he was always good, and gentle and truthful. He wasn't charged

with saying it in the pulpit, where all
the congregation could hear and testify,
but only outside, in talk. . . .

20

But Mark Twain did not recognize degree in morality. Right was right, and wrong was wrong. The Widow Douglas and Father Peter exemplified the true morality, in that they lived the kind of life in which there was visible good; but Miss Watson with her threats and Father Adolf with his loyalty to the church imposed a second morality, or a lesser morality which, since it was sanctioned by religion, seemed to the boys to be sanctioned by God.

This, of course, is a negative picture, a picture of what God is not, and it comes largely from the books for boys; few grown persons today would be seriously bothered by such a conception of God; yet the rationalizing of Tom and Huck about Sunday-school and Jehovah is illustrative of the traditional features of organized religion which Mark Twain considered objectionable. It must be kept in mind that he was writing for people not accustomed to theological or philosophical speculation; he was setting traps which would turn young minds from the prejudices of Calvinistic theology.

A third element in religion that provoked some comment from Mark Twain has to do with prayer. As he had been taught in childhood to believe in a conscious, punitive divinity, so he had been taught to

believe in the efficacy of prayer. Now we learn from his biographer that Mark Twain, for a time after his marriage, asked a blessing at meal-time, that he had no objection to prayer, and could offer up his thanksgivings with sincerity of feeling.²¹ But he felt that it was absurd to expect to gain by supplication things that are not within the bounds of reason.

In discussing Mark Twain's theory of energy, I have suggested that Mark Twain was a firm believer in acquisition and attainment by honest and persistent industry. Hard work, he teaches, is the surest way to a successful consummation of one's desires. How, then, could he subscribe to the popular belief that a prayer to God was like a letter to Santa Claus? It is not surprising that Mark Twain should doubt the efficacy of prayer, when only a little earlier Emerson had arrived at similar doubts, and had resigned his pulpit because he could not conscientiously pray in public.

Mark Twain held that prayer was needless primarily because few people, if any at all, were wise enough to know what to ask from God, even if they knew He would answer. The reasoning is logical and sound. Man is limited, God is infinite. God knows all, man knows comparatively little. Is it reasonable that man, then, can ask of God anything that God has not already foreseen and planned, or provided for in the scheme of things? Prayer is supererogation.

21

Biography. Works, XXX, 411.

In The Mysterious Stranger we find an example. Satan had been talking with the boys, Seppi and Theodor. Out of his divine wisdom and omniscience he had prophesied the drowning of Nikolaus and Lisa, twelve days hence. They begged, they prayed, Satan to change the careers of their two little friends. But Satan contended that death was better. Nikolaus, if permitted to live, would spend "forty-six²² years of sorrow and suffering." That was his other career. By her death, Lisa would be saved "from ten years of pain and slow recovery from an accident, and then from nineteen years of pollution, shame, depravity, crime, ending with death at the hands of the executioner. Twelve days hence she will die; her mother would save her life if she²³ could."

And the mother, Frau Brandt, came through the crowd after the accident, wild and disordered, and took little Lisa's body in her arms. She clenched her fist and lifted it toward the sky...and said:

For nearly two weeks I have had dreams and presentiments and warnings that death was going to strike what was most precious to me, and day and night and night and day I have grveled in the dirt before Him praying Him to have pity on my innocent child and save it from harm--and here is His answer!

Why, He had saved it from harm--but she did not know. She wiped the tears from her eyes and cheeks, and stood awhile gazing

²²

Works, XXVII, 86.

²³

Ibid.

down at the child and caressing its face and its hair with her hands; then she spoke again in that bitter tone: 'But in His hard heart is no compassion. I will never pray again.' ...Ah, that poor woman. It is as Satan said, we do not know good from bad, and are always mistaking the one for the other. Many a time since I have heard people pray to God to spare the life of sick persons, but I have never done it. 24

I have applied to prayer the word supererogation, but to Huck Finn, prayer was plain tom-foolery. What its adherents professed for it ran counter to the rational in Huck's mind. The boys had been out all night organizing the gang. Huck came in "clayey and greasy" and got a "going over from Miss Watson." He relates his experience:

She took me in the closet and prayed, but nothing came of it. She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By and by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out noway.

I set down one time back in the woods, and had a long think about it. I says to myself, if a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the money he lost on pork? Why can't the widow get back her silver snuffbox that was stole? Why can't Miss Watson fatten up? No, I says to myself, there ain't

nothing in it. I went and told the widow about it, and she said the thing a body could get by praying for it was spiritual gifts. This was too many for me, but she told me what she meant--I must help other people, and do everything I could for other people, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself. This was including Miss Watson, as I took it. I went out in the woods, and turned it over in my mind a long time, but I couldn't see no advantage about it--except for the other people; so at last I reckoned I wouldn't worry about it any more, but just let it go.

25

Nor did Mark Twain as a boy find prayer any more effective than Huck had found it. He attended Mrs. Horr's school, which always opened with prayer and scripture reading.

When she read that text, 'Ask and ye shall receive' and assured them that whoever prayed for a thing earnestly, his prayer would be answered, he believed it. A small schoolmate, the baker's daughter, brought gingerbread to school every morning, and little Sam was just 'honing' for some of it. He wanted a piece of that baker's gingerbread more than anything else in the world, and he decided to pray for it.

He did, and his prayer worked.

...Possibly she had heard his petition; at all events, his prayer bore fruit, and his faith at that moment would have moved Holli-day's Hill.

26

25

Works, XIII, 51-56.

26

Autobiography, Works, XXXVIII, 121. There is a variation of this incident in Mark Twain in Eruption, pp. 108-109.

But next day's repetition failed, and the next, and the next. Sam lost his faith. Not even the pan of gingerbread which his mother made for him when she learned his experience was able to remove his skepticism as to the power of prayer.

A summary of Mark Twain's attitude toward prayer reveals the following: He is known to have said grace at his table. He possibly enjoyed the emotional effect of offering up thanks for "blessings received." But he entertained no illusions as to the value of the petitions, first because of man's inability to discern ultimate ends, and second because man could gain by his own industry any reasonable object of his prayer.

The fourth grievance Mark Twain registers against organized religion is that its ministers, in becoming professionals, lose the closeness of touch with the divine which is so essential in a man of God. And yet, Mark Twain was not a hater of preachers. Paine quotes him as saying that he himself had youthful ministerial ambitions. "It was the most earnest ambition I ever had. Not that I ever really wanted to be a preacher, but because it never occurred to me that a preacher could be damned. It looked like a safe job." ²⁷ And it is known that he numbered several preachers among his closest acquaintances. Perhaps there was no one individual with whom he was more intimate than the Rev. Joe Twichell. The two often took long walks together. And in his works

27

Works, XXX, 84.

he does not paint the priest as a vicious person. I have called attention already to Father Peter, who had been caught saying that "God was all goodness and would find a way to save all his poor human children."²⁸ There are several good priests too in A Connecticut Yankee. Sir Boss tells us that in King Arthur's realm "not all priests were frauds and self-seekers, but many, the great majority of those that were down on the ground among the common people, were sincere and right-hearted, and devoted to the alleviation of human troubles and sufferings."²⁹ But he had a sharp word and a ready pen for minister or priest who violated his trust.

The case of the Rev. Talmage comes to mind here. This minister had objected to the common man's attending the same church as the rich man. Said Talmage:

...If you had all the churches free by reason of the mixing of the common people with the uncommon, you would keep one half of christendom sick at their stomach. If you are going to kill the church thus with bad smells I will have nothing to do with this work of evangelization.

30

To the unchristian attitude of this nominal servant of Christ, Mark Twain, the unorthodox, replied--doubtless with Christ's approval:

28

Works, XXVII, 5.

29

Works, XIV, 148.

30

Biography, Works, XXX, 405.

They [the disciples--Paul and Peter] healed the very beggars, and held intercourse with people of villainous odor every day. If the subject of these remarks had been chosen among the original Twelve Apostles he would not have associated with the rest, because he could not have stood the fishy smell of some of his comrades who came from around the Sea of Galilee. He would have resigned his commission with some such remark as he makes in the extract above: 'Master, if thou art going to kill the church thus with bad smells I will have nothing to do with this work of evangelization.' He is a disciple, and makes that remark to the Master; the only difference is that he makes it in the nineteenth instead of the first century.

31

It was this sort of experience that provoked Mark Twain to bitter assaults upon practiced Christianity. "If Christ were here now," he said, "there is one thing he would not be--a Christian."

32

Along with Talmage we place the despicable Pere Front, who, in Joan of Arc, pronounced the interdict upon the fairies. They were, he said, the children of the fiend. Fortunately, the fairies had a champion who was a free, inspired soul, not likely to accept the unreasonable dicta of an unfeeling clergy. Joan, impassioned, replied to Pere Front:

"Oh father, how can you talk like that:
Who owns France?"

"God, and the King."

31

Ibid.

32

Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 328.

"Not Satan?"

"Satan, my child? This is the footstool of the Most High--Satan owns no handful of its soil."

"Then who gave these poor creatures the fairies their home? God. Who protected them all these centuries? God. Who allowed them to dance and play there all those centuries and found no fault with it? God. Who disapproved of God's approval and put a threat upon them? A man. Who caught them again in harmless sports that God allowed and a man forbade, and carried out that threat, and drove the poor things away from the home the good God gave them in His mercy and His pity, and sent down His rain and dew and sunshine upon it five hundred years in token of his peace? ...

33

The Almighty needed no intermediary in this instance, for Joan understood perfectly the nature of God because she knew the God of Nature. When a minister got in the way--when he ceased to minister--Mark Twain served him a bitter dose.

We come now to the fifth and final element in this discussion of those features of organized religion which were certain to draw objections from Mark Twain. As he believed that an established church paralyzed thought and that prayer crippled action, so he thought that Bibles stood between man and a complete understanding of the Divine.

It is not known exactly when Mark Twain began forming his opinions about the Bible, but the evidence suggests that it must have been

comparatively early in his career. He may have got the impulse to think about the infallibility of Holy Scripture from Macfarlane, a chance acquaintance in Cincinnati, or from some one of the "literary" river pilots. His biographer quotes him as saying that he read Tom Paine's Age of Reason when he was a cub pilot.³⁴ We know that he had been a member of the Sunday-school in Hannibal and that he was quite familiar with Biblical history and quotations. We realize that he must have picked up much information about the Bible on his trip to the Holy Land; and in Roughing It, which deals with an earlier period of his life than The Innocents Abroad,³⁵ we gather that the author had fair acquaintance with scripture. Perhaps he lacked scholarly accuracy in his use of Biblical allusion. Archibald Henderson tells of the art critique which Mark Twain penned for The Golden Era after having looked at the painting "Sampson and Delilah" when it was exhibited in San Francisco.

Now what is the first thing you see in looking at this picture down at the bank exchange? Is it the gleaming eye and fine face of Sampson? or the muscular Philistine gazing furtively at the lovely Delilah? or is it the rich drapery? or is it the truth to nature in that pretty foot? No sir. The first thing that catches the eye is the scissors at her feet. Them scissors is too modern, thar warn't no scissors like them in them days--by a d--d sight.

36

34Works, XXXIII, 1445.

35

Vide, Roughing It, Works, III, 113, 116, 147, et passim.

36

Archibald Henderson, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

It is not certain whether this classifying Sampson as a Philistine is part of the joke or not. If it is not an intentional slip, it is the only Biblical inaccuracy I have noticed in all the works of Mark Twain, and his allusions are numerous.

But to get back to our problem of the beginnings of Mark Twain's questioning of Biblical authority, it seems likely that he began to doubt traditional interpretation between 1855 and 1860, with a year or two each way for lee. If he, as a boy, had considered the Bible an infallible guide, later evidence suggests that as a man he had ceased to regard it so. We discover in a letter written in 1887 that there had been a change in feeling.

People pretend that the Bible means the same thing to them at 50 that it did at all former milestones in their journey. I wonder how they can lie so. It comes of practice, no doubt. They would not say that of Dickens' or Scott's books. Nothing remains the same. When a man goes back to look at the house of his childhood, it has always shrunk: there is no instance of such a house being as big as the picture in the memory and imagination call for. Shrunk how? Why to its correct dimensions: that house hasn't altered; this is the first time it has been in focus.

37

Mark Twain believed he had the Bible "in focus." At least he looked at it without prejudice, as he did at Joseph Smith's book and at

 37

Letters, Works, XXXV, 490.

Mrs. Eddy's gospel. But there is evidence before 1889 of the change-- of his gaining his perspective. He was married in 1870. His wife was a devout, though it has been suggested, unorthodox Christian. Paine, the biographer, records something of the religious observance during the early years of marriage. His wife's

task in the beginning was easy enough. Clemens had not at that time formulated any particular doctrines of his own. His natural kindness of heart, and especially his love for his wife, inclined him toward the teachings and customs of her Christian faith--unorthodox but sincere, as Christianity in the Langdon family was likely to be. It took very little persuasion on his wife's part to establish family prayers in their home, grace before meals, and the morning reading of a Bible Chapter. Joe Goodman was dumbfounded to see Mark Twain ask a blessing and join the family worship. Just how long these forms continued cannot be known today; the time of their abandonment has perished from the recollection of anyone now living.

It would seem to have been that it was the Bible-reading that wrought the change. The prayer and the blessing were to him sincere and gracious; but as the readings continued he realized that he had never before considered the Bible from a doctrinal point of view, as a guide to spiritual salvation. To his logical reasoning mind, a large portion of it seemed absurd: a mass of fables and traditions, mere mythology. From such material humanity had built its mightiest edifice of hope, the doctrines of its faith. After a little while he could stand it no longer.

'Livy,' he said one day, 'you may keep this up if you want to, but I must ask you to excuse me from it. It is making me a hypocrite. I don't believe in this Bible. It contradicts

my reason. I can't sit here and listen to it, letting you believe that I regard it, as you do, in the light of gospel, the word of God.

38

The incident is characteristic of Mark Twain. He was honest with himself, and honest with his wife. His convictions were based on reason. Those who hold to the view that Olivia Clemens suppressed her husband's temperament and forced him into paths to him unpleasant will be surprised that Mrs. Clemens, in respect for his intellect, even gave up her active church work, commenting that if he was going to be lost, she wanted to be lost with him. Howells is our authority here, and he adds:

After they had both ceased to be formal Christians, she was still grieved by his denial of immortality, so grieved that he resolved upon one of those heroic lies, which for love's sake he held even above the truth, and he went to her, saying that he had been thinking the whole matter over, and now he was convinced that the soul did live after death. ...

I should say that he never went back to anything like faith in the Christian theology, or in the notion of life after death, or in a conscious divinity. ...All his expressions to me were of a courageous renunciation of any hope of living again, or elsewhere seeing those he had lost.

39

38

Biography, Works, XXX, 411.

39

W. D. Howells, My Mark Twain, p. 32.

We get another glimpse of the change in Mark Twain's attitude toward the Bible in his account of Life on the Mississippi. An entry, with comment, appears in his diary for April 19:

This morning struck into the region of full goatees, sometimes accompanied by a mustache, but only occasionally.

It was odd to come upon this thick crop of an obsolete and uncomely fashion; it was like running suddenly across a forgotten acquaintance whom you had supposed dead for a generation. The goatee extends over a wide extent of country, and is accompanied by an iron-clad belief in Adam, and the biblical history of creation which has not suffered from the assaults of the scientists. 40

We may suppose from this that the beliefs he had once entertained had at the time "suffered" from the assaults of the scientists. A little farther on we have a hint as to what he had substituted for his biblical beliefs. A visit to the old home town after many years

carried me back more than a generation in a moment and landed me in the midst of a time when the happenings of life were not the natural and logical results of great general laws, but of special orders, and were freighted with very precise and distinct purposes, partly punitive in intent, partly admonitory, and usually local in application. 41

40

Works, XII, 188. The italics are mine.

41

Ibid., p. 434.

This accords with the statement he made to his wife, "the Bible contradicts my reason." But there is evidence of a more serious study, a more specific objection to considering the Bible as the infallible word of God. Miss Minnie Brashear makes much of the influence of Tom Paine upon Clemens' thought. "The real source of Mark Twain's philosophy," she writes, "must be much earlier than in his reading of Lecky at Quarry Farm. ...His thinking, forsaking the freer trends of his own generation, was turned back into eighteenth-century channels. It was found that in his late teens he became interested in Tom Paine."

42

Then, in commenting on the influence of Paine upon Mark Twain, Miss Brashear continues:

From the first part of The Age of Reason Mark Twain as a young man might have got his initial glimpse of the mechanical theory of human life, which he finally formulated into a philosophical system. Part I explains the principles of Newtonian deism as based upon the phenomena of planetary rotation. It contains coarse ridicule of what Paine considered superstition, along with many eloquent passages in favor of pure morality founded upon natural religion. Its moral idealism must have constituted a large part of its appeal to Sam Clemens. And the place that orthodox Christianity had occupied in the thinking of the Clemens family, even if he had acquired no other point of contact with Paine up to that time, would have insured that the deistic arguments against Christian proofs, reviewed in the passionate spirit of a rough and ready controversialist, would arouse him either to accept or refute Paine's position.

42

42

Brashear, op. cit., p. 244.

43

Ibid., pp. 247-248.

A comparison between The Age of Reason and Mark Twain's essay entitled "As Concerns Interpreting the Diety" seems to indicate that Paine 's position was accepted. Paine distinguished between theology and religion, between religion and Christianity, and between theoretical and practical Christianity. The Christian system of faith appeared to him to be a compound "chiefly of manism." He objected to the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God on the grounds that anything which we would honor with that name must, of its nature, be impossible to change. If the Word of God was given in the original Hebrew language, we should have to learn Hebrew in order to comprehend its meaning, for much is lost in translating. The Word of God, if there be any such, must be in God's language, and can therefore "not exist in any human or written language." If, then, we wish to know what God is, we must "search not in the book called the Scripture, which any human hand might make, but the scripture called the Creation."

These are the bases of Mark Twain's protests against religion as an institution. Our contrast between Father Peter and Father Adolf, between the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson, between Jesus and Mrs. Eddy, between Pere Frout and Joan of Arc--all these contrasts seem to insist upon a distinction between theology and religion, religion and Christianity, practical and theoretical Christianity. The attack upon Talmage indicates the ideal relationship between the individual and the institution as it was conceived by Mark Twain.

As to the matter of translating Holy Scripture from one language to another, Mark Twain uses the same method, reaches the same conclusion as Thomas Paine, but illustrates his method more fully than Paine did. Under a line of hieroglyphs (which I shall not attempt to reproduce here) Mark Twain subscribes four translations, only four, out of the fifty-eight which have been made by scholars from Champollion to Rawlinson. Here are the four:

Therefore let the worship of Epiphanes be maintained in all the temples; this upon pain of death. -- Champollion.

The horse of Epiphanes shall be maintained at the public expense; this upon pain of death. -- Grunfeldt.

The priest shall explain the wisdom of Epiphanes to all these people, and these shall listen with reverence, upon pain of death. -- Gospodin.

Therefore, walk not away from the wisdom of Epiphanes, but turn and follow it; so shall it conduct thee to the temples of peace, and soften for thee the sorrows of life and the pains of death. -- Rawlinson.

44

Suppose, Mark Twain would reason, that man's happiness today depended upon obedience to the command above. Which of the four, or which of the fifty-eight translations would he act upon? His observation of varying translations of the Bible told him that translators of scripture were faced with the same difficulties as were the decipherers of the hieroglyphs.

How, then, should man know his way? Look at Joan of Arc, standing before her tormentors, the gowned professors and scholars who were trying to trick her with theological argot. The Book of God, she said, is not concerned with trivialities of men. "Listen!" she commanded them, "The Book of God is worth more than all these ye cite, and I stand upon it. And I tell ye there are things in that Book that not one among ye can read, with all your learning!"⁴⁵

Obviously Joan is not referring to the Bible. She could not read. What was the Book she had in mind? We might find our answer in Mark Twain's own definition. The real Bible

...is Nature and her history; we read it every day, and we could understand it and trust in it if we would burn the spurious one and dig the remains of our insignificant reasoning faculties out of the grave where that and other man-made Bibles have buried them for two thousand years and more. ...The Book of Nature tells us...that His laws inflict pain and suffering and sorrow, but it does not say that this is done in order that He may get pleasure out of this misery. ...The law of Distribution of Comfort and Pain shows an entire absence of sentimental justice. ...The laws are hard and fast.

46

Thus, one by one, Mark Twain, through his observation, his study, and his common sense, has attacked the claims of organized religion. The laws of science and Nature, the laws of cause and effect,

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Works, XVII, 165.

46

Mark Twain's Notebook, pp. 362-363.

have taken the place of a conscious, punitive Providence. Hard work and honest dealing will realize one's desires without prayer; whereas prayer alone is ineffectual. The word of God, the Book of Nature, is open to all who will read. Man-made Bibles stand between man and God. Such was Mark Twain's analysis of formal ritual and worship. I have tried to show that whatever he found of value in religion he recognized and praised, but whatever religious institution stood between God and man, he wrathfully despised.

CHAPTER VI

MARK TWAIN'S "PESSIMISM"

Early in this study the observation was made that Mark Twain presented no psychological problem to his intimates and contemporaries. Howells and Paine, we have seen, did comment upon the language he sometimes used to express his contempt for the foibles of human kind. But Paine drew a distinction between Mark Twain's personal rage and his philosophy, and Howells discovered in him only gentle humanity which was aroused to moral chagrin by man's abuse of man. The analysis of What Is Man? seems to confirm Paine's statement that Mark Twain's philosophy was one thing, his personal rage another; and the investigation of Mark Twain's views upon religion and society seems to validate the opinion of Howells.

It is only in recent years that the matter of Mark Twain's "pessimism" has become a problem to scholars, but peculiarly enough, the great bulk of what has been written on the subject seems not to have contributed greatly to its solution. One is reminded of the remark made by Edgar Allan Poe to the effect that ninety-nine subjects out of a hundred are not discussed because they are obscure, but are obscure because they are discussed. This seems to be true of what is

known as Mark Twain's "pessimism," and the obscurity has continued unrelieved primarily because of the insistence of critics that Mark Twain's philosophy is somehow dependent upon his frequently ill-controlled temper. These critics, we have seen, can be classified roughly into two schools: one, led by Professor Brooks, has decided that Mark Twain's "despair" is the result of his philosophy; the other, led by Mr. DeVoto, has decided that Mark Twain's philosophy is the result of his "despair." Let us examine more closely the claims of these two schools of thought. The following statement by Professor Brooks takes us at once to the heart of his thesis:

From his philosophy alone, therefore, we can see that Mark Twain was a frustrated spirit, a victim of arrested development, and beyond this fact, as we know from innumerable instances the psychologists have placed before us, we need not look for an explanation of the chagrin of his old age. He had been balked, he had been divided, he had been turned, as we shall see, against himself; the poet, the artist in him, consequently, had withered into the cynic and the whole man had become a spiritual valetudinarian.

1

"From his philosophy alone we gather that Mark Twain was a frustrated spirit." This statement leads us to believe that Professor Brooks had examined the philosophy and had drawn his conclusions from a careful analysis of it. But one may search The Ordeal in vain to find a more detailed account of What Is Man? than is contained in the following

 1

Van Wyck Brooks, op. cit., p. 25. The italics are mine.

paragraph. Here is the insignificant portion of Mark Twain's philosophy from which "we can see that Mark Twain was a frustrated spirit":

We are in possession now, it seems to me, of the secret of Mark Twain's mechanistic philosophy, the philosophy of that little book which he called his 'Bible,' 'What Is Man?' He was extremely proud of the structure of logic he had built up on the thesis that man is a machine, moved, directed, commanded by exterior forces solely, that he is 'a chameleon, who takes the color of his place of resort,' that he is 'a mere coffeemill,' which is permitted neither 'to supply the coffee nor turn the crank.' He confesses to a sort of proprietary interest and pleasure in the validity of that notion. 'Having found the Truth,' he says, 'perceiving that beyond all question man has but one moving impulse--the contenting of his own spirit--and is merely a machine and entitled to no personal merit for what he does, it is not humanly possible for me to seek further. ...'

2

This one paragraph of careless culls from What Is Man? is supposed to be the basis for the remark, "From his philosophy alone, we can see that Mark Twain was a frustrated spirit," According to this statement, the Truth of which Mark Twain is so proud is the observation that man is a machine. Notice that the only feature of Mark Twain's philosophy that Mr. Brooks hits upon is the machine figure. Not a word about the training process, to which practically one third of the essay is devoted. Not a word about Mark Twain's admiration for the energy of the superlative engine. Not a comment on the Admonition, which is the key

note of the philosophy--repeated twice in italics. And not a hint about the Old Man's good cheer and his denial of pessimism at the very close of What Is Man?

Having seen thus the rather shaky basis for the critical view that Mark Twain's "despair" is the result of his philosophy, let us now look at the other claim, that Mark Twain's philosophy is the result of his "despair." Mr. Bernard DeVoto, in the introduction to his recent edition of some of Mark Twain's papers, in discussing What Is Man? the Autobiography, and The Mysterious Stranger, labels them "symbols of despair." His point is well taken, and quite an improvement over that of Professor Brooks. In commenting on the latter years (1890-1906), he writes:

This period of Mark Twain's life has not been adequately described. A series of disasters brought about a reorientation of his personality and gave his talent a different slope. His publishing firm failed; his fortune and his wife's were dissipated in the failure of the Paige type-setting machine; his health broke and, a bankrupt at the age of sixty, he had to make a heartbreaking effort to pay off his debts; his oldest daughter died, his youngest daughter developed epilepsy; his wife declined into permanent invalidism. His world toppled in ruins round him, all the bases of his belief were called into question, and his talent was so impaired that for a long time it seemed to have been destroyed. When at last it was integrated again there is no longer to be seen the Mark Twain who had had a coherent development up to A Connecticut Yankee. There is a new Mark Twain, the author of What Is Man? and The Mysterious Stranger. ...Through that bewildered

groping one is eventually able to trace the development of three things: a sequence of homilies on man's weakness and God's hostility, some of which were eventually formed into What Is Man?, a sequence of stories which shift through many artistic and psychological adaptations till they produce The Mysterious Stranger--and the Autobiography.

All three begin at the same time, all three originate in the same need, all three are essentially the same thing. ...They were made necessary by the events of the '90's--and are an effort to explain them. They were produced by the climactic experiences of Mark Twain's life and they represent, not a complete change, certainly, for their elements were always in him though held in healthy equilibrium of his artistic success and personal happiness, but a new orientation of his personality and a new if minor expression of his genius.

3

This, to be sure, is closer to the real Mark Twain than Professor Brooks ever approached, but it still leaves out part of the picture. Mr. DeVoto does note that Mark Twain's life from 1890 to 1906 was made sad by several pathetic occurrences; he observes also that the views expressed in these books "represent, not a complete change, for their elements were always in him"; yet, there are four doubtful statements in the conclusions which Mr. DeVoto reaches.

First, it is to be doubted that What Is Man?, The Mysterious Stranger, and the Autobiography "begin at the same time, originate in the same need, and are essentially the same thing." Paine has told us

³
DeVoto, Mark Twain in Eruption, pp. XIX, XXI. The italics are mine.

that as early as 1874 Clemens had been impressed by Lecky's theory that all morality is the result of experience. That was thirty-three years before the publishing of What Is Man? (1907). Mr. DeVoto himself includes in Mark Twain in Eruption the Preface to the essay, written in 1905. "The studies for these papers were begun twenty-five ⁴ or twenty-seven years ago; the papers were written seven years ago. ..." [i.e. 1898]. In another place Mark says: "I have talked my gospel rather freely in conversation for twenty-five years..." ⁵

Judging from the date Paine gives (1874), and the dates we get from Mr. DeVoto's edition [c. 1880], it appears that some twenty years intervened between the beginnings of What Is Man? and the composition of The Mysterious Stranger, 1898. If the two books were not begun at the same time, they did not necessarily originate in the same need. And while a philosophical treatise, an autobiography, and a romance may all contain ideas in common, I should hesitate to call them "essentially the same thing." They all were constructed on the same philosophic principles--the principles of What Is Man?--but they were not built out of a common despair, as Mr. DeVoto would lead us to believe.

Second, if the philosophy of What Is Man? dates as far back as 1880, or even 1887, it is to be doubted that, as Mr. DeVoto states, "all the bases of his belief were called into question." What were the bases

⁴

Mark Twain in Eruption, p. 238. The italics are mine.

⁵

Ibid., p. 240. The italics are mine.

of Mark Twain's belief? They have been outlined in the preceding chapters; the bases of his belief are to be found in What Is Man? and in the philosophic expressions set down in others of his works. Does Mr. DeVoto intend to imply, then, that Mark Twain had been formulating his philosophy for twenty-five years, but did not believe it--that he had another philosophy on the side? What was the other one? It could not have been Christianity, for we have noted that Mark Twain had rejected the Hebrew God and the divinity of Jesus in the early '80's. No, it appears that Mark Twain had one system of beliefs, the system he himself built over a period of years, and that that system helped him endure the disasters which fell upon him.

Third, Mr. DeVoto is on uncertain ground when he declares that, during the period 1890-1906, Mark Twain's "talent was so impaired that for a long time it seemed to have been destroyed." This would mean, if true, that everything appearing in What Is Man?, The Mysterious Stranger, and the Autobiography is desperate, out of balance, and incoherent; whereas, in fact, there is about enough of "the old Mark Twain" in each of these books to counterbalance the so-called desperate passages. If we accept the theory that Mark Twain's talent was so impaired, what shall we say about the essay "In Defense of Harriet Shelley," a beautiful piece of work, prompted solely by humanitarian impulses? Was this a symbol of despair? What shall we say of his best-loved book, Joan of Arc, part of which was composed in these years? We do not find here, of course, the boisterous, rollicking humorist of "The Jumping Frog," but

we do find the humanitarian we have observed in his pages from The Innocents Abroad to The Mysterious Stranger.

Fourth, it is to be doubted that The Mysterious Stranger may be properly called "a sequence of stories which shift through many artistic and psychological adaptations." In a letter written to Howells in 1898, Mark Twain said of the book: "Twice I didn't start it right; and got pretty far in, both times, before I found out. . . ." It would seem that the trouble with the various attempts at The Mysterious Stranger was artistic, but I do not know how one would set about proving that Mark Twain was having psychological difficulties. Several times he would begin writing, would work into a blind alley, would back up and begin again. Such was true also of Huckleberry Finn; likewise of Pudd'n-head Wilson, which grew out of Those Extraordinary Twins. Mark tells us that he would begin a story by letting his characters talk; if their conversation came smoothly and naturally, he knew he was on the right track—he did not write the book—he just recorded the observations of his characters. The Mysterious Stranger presents, then, no groping, no psychological uncertainty which the author did not likewise experience in writing various others of his works. Had Mark Twain ever finished the piece, more could be definitely said about his intentions, but as it stands, one is not entirely convinced that the final chapter which Paine has appended to the tale is the conclusion which Mark Twain would have admitted for the completed story.

⁶
Works, XXXV, 681.

Neither the position of Mr. Brooks nor that of Mr. DeVoto regarding Mark Twain's "pessimism" is tenable in the full light of all the facts. Neither has taken into consideration the educational system of What Is Man? or the moral didacticism which pervades the other works. The theory which claims that Mark Twain's philosophy produced his "despair" is based upon an insufficient knowledge of What Is Man? And the thesis which attempts to show that "despair" produced Mark Twain's philosophy disregards the chronological facts. And both schools seem to ignore those elements in Mark Twain's philosophy which apparently comforted him in grief and sustained him in adversity.

In 1893, when the failure of the typesetting machine had plunged Mark Twain into deepest depression, when he found himself pressed for funds by the exhaustion of his fortune, he wrote the "Defense of Harriet Shelley"⁷--"one of his noblest defenses of humanity." In '94, when things seemed at their darkest, he could write the second part of Joan of Arc and then add, "Possibly the book may not sell, but that is nothing--it was written for love."⁸ When he made what Mr. DeVoto calls the "heart-breaking effort to pay off his debts," Mark Twain could write of the "pleasure he experienced in repaying those whom he owed";⁹ in '96, after Susy's death, there is no ranting and raging such as we might expect

⁷ Letters, Works, XXXV, 619.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 656. The italics are mine.

from a "desperate old man," but only sweet letters of resignation to Joe Twichell, Susy's pastor. To Mrs. Henry C. Robinson he wrote: "In my despair and unassuageable misery I upbraid myself for ever parting with her. But there is no use in that. Since it was to happen it would have happened."¹⁰ His philosophy sustained him in bearing Susy's death as it sustained him during his wife's illness, at her death, and at Jean's death. Certainly, these losses affected him, caused him, as he said, unassuageable grief, but they were not the causes of a despair which resulted in his philosophy. I am inclined to accept the statement made by Paine, who says:

Yet the years were not unkindly to Mark Twain. They brought him sorrow, but they brought him likewise the capacity and opportunity for large enjoyment, and at the last they laid upon him a kind of benediction. Naturally impatient, he grew always more gentle, more generous, more tractable and considerate as the seasons passed. His final days may be said to have been spent in the tranquil light of a summer afternoon.

11

But let us look further into these three works that are called the "symbols of despair." Let us carefully review the contents, and weigh the evidence judicially in order to find the extreme "pessimism." We have already examined pretty thoroughly What Is Man? But there is

¹⁰

Ibid., p. 637.

¹¹

Letters, Works, XXXIV, 18.

one additional passage in the essay which should be noted here. Earlier in this study we have seen the workings of the physical, the mental, and the moral machine of which man is composed. We have seen how the philosophy of Mark Twain provided for training to perfection each of these mechanisms. It has been suggested that the essay was devoted to basic morality, and that the Admonition appears as evidence of this fact. Before turning to the essay again, we should notice another statement from the analysis by Van Wyck Brooks. On the opening page of his Ordeal he speaks of Mark Twain's "belief that man is the meanest of the animals and life a tragic mistake." Let us turn now to What Is Man? both for the correction of this error, and for the purpose of showing what it actually was that Mark Twain hated in man. The Old Man has been illustrating to the Young Man the remarkable intelligence of animals--of ants, birds, the dog, the elephant, and others. He has objected to the Young Man's calling animals "dumb beasts," for since they are able to think, and to converse among themselves, they are neither dumb nor bestial, in the commonly accepted sense of that term. He prefers the name "Unrevealed Creatures." Now the Young Man speaks:

Y. M. We have come a good way. As a result--as I understand it--I am required to concede that there is absolutely no intellectual frontier separating Man and the Unrevealed Creatures?

O. M. That is what you are required to concede. There is no such frontier--there is no way to get around that. Man has a finer and more capable machine in

him than those others, but it is the same machine and works in the same way. ...

Y. M. Then man and the other animals are all alike, as to mental machinery, and there isn't any difference of any stupendous magnitude between them, except in quality, not in kind.

O. M. That is about the state of it--intellectuality. There are pronounced limitations on both sides. We can't learn to understand much of their language, but the dog, the elephant, etc., learn to understand a very great deal of ours. To that extent they are our superiors. On the other hand, they can't learn reading, writing, etc., nor any of our fine and high things, and there we have a large advantage over them.

Let me pause here a moment to emphasize three things which Professor Brooks seems not to have noticed; one, "man has a finer and more capable machine in him" than animals; two, his thought machine is capable of a quality product impossible to the animals; three, man has "fine and high things" which give him a large advantage over animals. We gather from this that it is not Mark Twain's philosophy which rates man "the meanest of the animals." The Young Man continues:

Y. M. Very well, let them have what they've got, and welcome; there is still a wall, and a lofty one. They haven't got the Moral Sense; we have it, and it lifts us immeasurably above them.

O. M. What makes you think that?

Y. M. Now look here--let us call a halt. I have stood the other infamies and insanities and that is enough; I am not going to have man and the other animals put on the same level morally.

6. M. I wasn't going to hoist man up to that.

Y. M. This is too much! I think it is not right to jest about such things.

O. M. I am not jesting, I am merely reflecting a plain and simple truth--and without uncharitableness. The fact that man knows right from wrong proves his intellectual superiority to the other creatures; but the fact that he can do wrong proves his moral inferiority to any creature that cannot. It is my belief that this position is not assailable.

12

Here is the heart of Mark Twain's "pessimism." Man has a superb mind, a trained mechanism which could point out the best and the right--but, equipped with such a machine, man either has led others the wrong way, or has allowed himself to be led the wrong way! It was a glance at history, usually, current or ancient, that upset Mark Twain and caused him to "damn the human race." Paine records the following anecdote:

Once when Joe Twichell heard me cursing the human race, and he said, 'Why Mark, you are the last person in the world to do that--one selected and set apart as you are.' I said 'Joe, you don't know what you are talking about. I am not cursing altogether about my own little troubles. Anyone can stand his own misfortunes; but when I read in the papers all about the rapscalities and outrages going on, I realize what a creature the human animal is. Don't you care more about the wretchedness of others than anything that happens to you?' Joe said he did, and shut up.

13

12

Works, XXVI, 88-89.

13

Works, XXXIII, 1336.

It was in November, 1906, that Mark read the following excerpt in the Chicago Interior (Presbyterian):

For ourselves we do thoroughly believe that man, as he lives just here on this tiny earth, is in essence and possibilities the most sublime existence in all the range of non-divine being--the chief love and delight of God.

The following is a characteristic bitter--humorous answer to the presumptuousness of the idea--"man--the chief love and delight of God":

Land, it is just for the world the way I feel about it myself, sometimes, even when dry. And when not dry, even those warm words are not nearly warm enough to get up to what I am feeling, when I am holding on to something, and blinking affectionately at myself in the glass, and recollecting that I'm it.

And when I am feeling historical, there is nothing that ecstasifies me like hunting the Chief Love and Delight of God around and around just here on this tiny earth and watching him perform. I watch him progressing and progressing, always mounting higher and higher, sometimes by means of the Inquisition, sometimes by means of the Terror, sometimes by eight hundred years of witch-burning...; and when he gets down to today I still look at him spread out over a whole page of the morning paper, grabbing in Congress, grabbing in Albany, grabbing in New York and St. Louis and all around, lynching the innocent, slobbering hypocrisies, reeking, dripping, unsavory, but always recognizable as the same old Most Sublime Existence in all the range of Non-Divine Being, the Chief Love and Delight of God; and then I am more gladder than ever that I am it.

14

There is no denying the bitterness of this picture, but it is not desperate. It accords with Mark Twain's philosophy: we see Man who is able to think; able to discern the right, but who does the wrong. The evil lies as much in his training as in Man himself. If Mark Twain had despaired of Man, would he have written about training the machine? If Mark Twain had been balked and frustrated, would he have formulated a philosophy which taught that Man's conscience--his moral self--could be trained to higher and even higher ideals?

But even the bitterness of such a picture as the foregoing did not leave the Old Man melancholy or depressed, nor did the philosophy as it was expressed in What Is Man? leave him desperate or cynical. The system outlined in the essay appears to the Young Man to be one of despair, but the philosopher denies it.

Y. M. ...By your scheme, all man's pride is abolished; he is degraded to a machine, he is a nobody, his noble prides wither to mere vanities; let him strive as he may, he can never be any better than his humblest and stupidest neighbor; he would never be cheerful again, his life would never be worth the living.

O. M. You really think that?

Y. M. I certainly do.

O. M. Have you ever seen me uncheerful, unhappy?

Y. M. No.

O. M. Well, I believe these things. Why
have they not made me unhappy? 15

The Old Man, or Mark Twain, is neither bitter nor unhappy over his philosophy. He had taught that to learn the right and to do the right for one's own sake was the greatest good; this is not a pessimistic philosophy; but he was bitter over the sight of a human race "content, always content, happy, thankful, proud, no matter what its religion is, nor whether its matter be tiger or house-cat."¹⁶ Do not such charges against man lead us back to the conclusion that religious prejudices and social injustices were about the only things which provoked Mark Twain to "damn the human race"?

Let us look now at the Autobiography, another "symbol of despair." As Paine tells us, and as Mr. DeVoto reiterates, Mark Twain thought he could tell his life story without bothering to give it form or organization. He simply began talking, and wherever his memory or fancy led him, there he followed.

As we might expect, therefore, the Autobiography contains about as many digressions and opinions as it does actual facts of its author's life. In a general way, the Autobiography treats of the same experiences that the other autobiographical works treat, such works as Roughing It, Life on the Mississippi, A Tramp Abroad, and Following the Equator. Mark

¹⁵
Works, XXVI, 105-106. The italics are mine.

¹⁶
Ibid., The italics are mine.

Twain tells of his lecture tours with G. W. Cable, and of Cable's¹⁷ discovery of the original Col. Sellers. He relates the story of General Grant's Memoirs, of the typesetting machine; he retells the turnip-eating scene of The Gilded Age. He speaks much of the Hannibal days, rehearses scenes that had figured in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.¹⁸ He speaks of his "Presbyterian trained conscience," his early belief that "local crimes and tragedies were inventions of Providence¹⁹ to beguile me to a better life." Allusions to these prejudicial beliefs, together with Mark Twain's attitude toward them, have already been presented. In addition, the autobiographer has stories to tell about his mother, about James Lampton, about Warner, Howells, George Dolby, Charles W. Stoddard, and others who had influenced his life.²⁰ He talks also about grammar and tautology, "right words," "the secret of narrative,"²¹ and about the style of good composition. The subjects are too many and too varied for us to take account of them all. We might find several pages devoted to Mrs. Clemens' method of disciplining²² her children, then a lengthy description of the Villa Quarto in Florence.²³

¹⁷ Works, XXXVI, 93.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

²¹ Ibid., p. 237.

²² XXXVII, 49.

²³ XXXVI, 210.

But among all these digressions and anecdotes one does find occasional expressions of bitterness. What are they? The same things pointed to already--social injustice and religious prejudice--man who could do right but who would do wrong. For example, Mark Twain states again his aversion to becoming affiliated with any party or any church.²⁴ We have already noted his reasons. Of patriotism he remarks: "I would not voluntarily march under this country's flag or any other, when it was my private judgement that the country was in the wrong."²⁵ Here is the application of his philosophy--if he knew the right he would do the right, regardless of "public morals." Elsewhere, he expresses again his hatred of war, and for the Christian inhumanity that accompanies it.²⁶ He becomes indignant over the "Moro Slaughter," a massacre of innocents in the Philippine Islands, and he berates the newspapers for praising the "bravery" of the American soldiers instead of crying out against the horror of the deed.²⁷

Such illustrations as these could be continued indefinitely, without our ever coming to a definite point about the Autobiography as a "symbol of despair." Let us narrow the discussion now to three specific citations that seem to bear upon this matter. First, there is a

²⁴

XXXVII, 15.

²⁵

Ibid., p. 18.

²⁶

Ibid., p. 190.

²⁷

Ibid., p. 193.

very bitter statement against man. Mark Twain is telling about a friend of his:

He [Macfarlane] said that man's heart was the only bad heart in the animal kingdom; that man was the only animal capable of feeling malice, envy, vindictiveness, revengefulness, hatred, selfishness, the only animal that could endure personal uncleanness and a filthy habitation, the sole animal in whom was fully developed the base instinct called patriotism, the sole animal that robs, persecutes, oppresses, and kills members of his own immediate tribe, the sole animal that steals and enslaves the members of any tribe.

He claimed that man's intellect was a brutal addition to him and degraded him to a rank far below the plane of other animals, and that there was never a man who did not use his intellect daily all his life to advantage himself at other people's expense. The divinest divine reduced his domestics to humble servitude under him by advantage of his superior intellect, and those servants in turn were above a still lower grade of people by force of brains that were still a little better than theirs.

28

This is the bitterest indictment, I believe, anywhere in the works of Mark Twain, and it would seem to prove the "despair theories" -- if this were Mark Twain's philosophy. But we must not let the facts escape us. This quotation is Mark Twain's summary of the philosophy of a certain Macfarlane, a Cincinnati acquaintance of the youthful Sam, who at the time was in his twentieth year. Little is known about this man

Macfarlane, the ostensible speaker in the passage above. He was forty years old when Mark Twain knew him, and could define any word the young man might find in the big dictionary. This morbid philosophy of Macfarlane is doubtless one of the influences upon Mark Twain's thinking—
 29
 indeed Mark Twain admits the influence—but the differences between the two are easily apparent. Macfarlane taught the intellectual inferiority of man to animals; Clemens, as we have seen, claimed that man's intellect was superior in quality, but that man was morally inferior because he could discern the right and yet would persist in wrong. And whereas Macfarlane was so pessimistic that he offered no relief to the picture he painted, Clemens offered a system of training whereby man might achieve his superb possibilities.

Now if we assume that Mark Twain's philosophy grew out of the seed planted by this obscure friend, then it is impossible to accept the dictum that his philosophy is a symbol of despair produced by the train of disasters which hit Mark Twain from 1890 to 1906, for, so we learn from the Autobiography, Mark Twain was twenty when he heard these things from Macfarlane (1855); and if the claim is true that What Is Man? was written in 1905, but had been talked and discussed for "twenty-five or twenty-seven" years, the date of the philosophy as Mark Twain remade it, would be about 1878-80. Thus, it appears that it is chronologically inaccurate to label the philosophy a "symbol of despair."

 29

Autobiography, Works, XXXVI, 143-147. Although Mark Twain does not discuss objectively this passage, he makes this statement (p. 146): "Of course his thinking and reasoning and philosophizing were those of a but partly taught and wholly untrained mind, yet he hit by accident upon some curious and striking things."

The second specific illustration from the Autobiography which seems to disprove the theory of Mark Twain's despair is another reference to the death of Susy which shows his philosophic acceptance of the occurrences of life.

Susy died at the right time, the fortunate time of life, the happy age--twenty-four years. At twenty-four, such a girl has seen the best of life--life as a happy dream. After that age the risks begin; responsibility comes, and with it the cares, the sorrows, and the inevitable tragedy. For her mother's sake, I would have her brought back from the grave if I could, but not for my own.

30

We understand better Mark Twain's attitude toward death if we reflect upon the observation which Theodor Fischer made in The Mysterious Stranger, that death is a relief from the turmoil and struggle of life. Is it not true that only one strong in his philosophy is able to adhere to such a belief when experiencing the death of the child dearer to him than all else? He had written similarly of Ward Cheney, a youth who died at about the same age as Susy: "Like Susy he got out of life all that was worth the living, and got his great reward before he had crossed the tropic frontier of dreams and entered the Sahara of fact."³¹

His own absolute fearlessness at death, his calm resolution at the death of his loved ones--a characteristic that may be traced back to

³⁰
Works, XXXVII, 146.

³¹
Letters, Works, XXXV, 697.

the time when he was twenty-three, i.e., 1858--this is one of the most certain bits of evidence, it seems to me, that Mark Twain's philosophy was an early production of his mind, and strong enough to sustain him through the vicissitudes of daily existence.

The third passage in the Autobiography which seems to invalidate the theories of despair is the testimony of a blind girl, Helen Keller. Mark Twain had a share in this remarkable girl's education, and some beautiful letters passed between the two. Helen Keller had observed that "Mark Twain was noted for his humor and for his wisdom,"³² and once, when Mark had agreed to preside at a meeting the purpose of which was to raise funds for educational benevolences, Helen Keller wrote to him:

You once told me you were a pessimist, Mr. Clemens, but great men are usually mistaken about themselves. You are an optimist. If you were not, you would not preside at the meeting, for it is an answer to pessimism.

33

Is it not so? Do not active benevolence, a system of training the ideals upward, a philosophy of education and energy and earned deserts--do not all of these negate pessimism and despair?

We come now to the third "symbol of despair," The Mysterious Stranger. We have already met some of the characters of this tale in

³²
Works, XXXVII, 298.

³³
Ibid., p. 302.

the chapters dealing with society and religion. It was there suggested that Satan's attacks on man were based upon religious prejudice and social injustice. Satan's theater of human progress, in which the boys were showed all the murder, the lust, the thievery of all the ages, seems to substantiate this view. In What Is Man? we have noted the galling feature of the whole historic processional is that man is able to be proud of his "progress," and brag about his Moral Sense. There are some twenty passages in The Mysterious Stranger in which Satan denounces the human race. Of these twenty, nine laugh at man's pride in his moral sense. Here is a sample. Satan is speaking to Theodor:

When a brute inflicts pain he does it innocently; it is not wrong; for him there is no such thing as wrong. And he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it--only man does that. Inspired by that mongrel Moral Sense of his! A sense whose function is to distinguish between right and wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do. Now what advantage can he get out of that? He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong. There shouldn't be any wrong; and without the Moral Sense there couldn't be any. And yet he is such an unreasoning creature that he is not able to perceive that the Moral Sense degrades him to the bottom layer of animated beings and is a shameful possession. ...

34

His philosophy, notice, is still a matter of basic morality, which is predicated upon the teachings of the Old Man in What Is Man?--a philosophy which was formulated between 1855 and 1880.

The other eleven Satanic indictments against man in The Mysterious Stranger deal with witch-burning, public morals versus private morals, personal merit, and such other matters as have been treated elsewhere in this study.

Now the question is, is the Mark Twain who wrote the "symbols of despair" permanently different or philosophically altered from the earlier Mark Twain? The evidence, I believe, does not support an affirmative answer. There is a temperamental balance throughout his works, a balance by contrasts, as Professor Smith pointed out, and a philosophic evenness which is demonstrable. Let me add one other bit of evidence to that which has already been presented. Van Wyck Brooks pictures the senile Clemens as something far different from the youthful Mark Twain. Here is his argument based upon The Mysterious Stranger:

Isn't the village of Eseldorf in reality Hannibal, Missouri, all over again, and are not the boys through whose eyes the story is told simply reincarnations of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, those characters which, as we know from a hundred evidences, haunted Mark Twain's mind all his life long? They are, at any rate, Mark Twain's boys, and whoever compares their moral attitude with that of the boys of Mark Twain's prime will see how deeply the iron had entered his soul. 'We boys wanted to warn them'--Marget and Ursula, against the danger that was gathering about them--'but we found that we were not man enough or brave enough to do a dangerous action when there was a chance that it could get us into trouble.' What! Is this Mark Twain speaking, the creator of Huck and Tom, who gladly broke every law

of the tribe to protect and rescue Nigger Jim? ...Can we, in the light of this, continue to say that Mark Twain's pessimism was due to anything so external as the hatred of tyranny?...

35

Professor Brooks, in his eagerness to prove his theory, either has failed to see the temperamental balance in character contrasts, or has purposely omitted all which did not serve his ends. There is no reason to suppose that Theodor Fischer and Seppi Wohlmeyer of The Mysterious Stranger are the products of a Mark Twain temperamentally different from the Mark Twain who created Huck and Tom. Consider the situations: Huck and Tom did not in reality "break every law of the tribe to protect and rescue Nigger Jim." Huck did struggle with his conscience, but Tom Sawyer was merely playing a game. He knew from the first that Nigger Jim had been set free by Miss Watson just before she died. Remember, too, that Huck did not go out of his way either to protect the slave or to rescue the runaway. Huck and Jim were thrown together by chance on the same island--Huck merely had to consent to Jim's company on the raft. The struggle in Huck's mind has been overemphasized. Huck's temperament decided the issue. The company of Nigger Jim offered greater contentment to Huck's Master Passion than did the reward for a runaway slave. And remember, too, that all the activity for rescuing Jim was planned and managed by Tom, who was playing a game and who knew that Jim was free. Can we praise this "moral attitude"? The contrast here

differentiates the romance of Tom on the one hand and the realism of Huck on the other; the issue is not a matter of morals.

Now, picture the same Tom and Huck in the graveyard. They have just seen Indian Joe stab Dr. Robinson. The drunken Muff Potter is the obvious murderer--only the Indian, Tom, and Huck know the truth. The boys--the brave little souls of Mark Twain's prime, so pictured by Professor Brooks--broke and ran to the tannery. "By and by when their pulses slowed down, Tom whispered:

"Huckleberry, what do you reckon'll come of this?"

"If Dr. Robinson dies, I reckon hangin'll come of it."

"Do you though?"

"Why, I know it Tom."

Tom thought a while and said: "Who'll tell? We?"

"What are you talking about? S'pose something happened and Injun Joe didn't hang. Why he'd kill us some time or other, just as dead sure as we're a-laying here."

...

"Tom we got to keep mum. You know that. That Injun devil wouldn't make any more of drownding us than a couple of cats, if we was to squeak 'bout this and they didn't hang him. Now, look-a-here, Tom, less take and swear to one another--that's what we got to do--swear to keep mum."

36

Where have our stout lads disappeared to? Muff Potter, an innocent man, is going to pay the extreme penalty for a crime he did not commit, but Huck and Tom swear to keep the secret, because "there was a chance it could get them into trouble." These are the same boys, but what about their "moral attitude"?

Similarly, in The Mysterious Stranger, there is a balance between characters. If Seppi and Theodor were cowards on occasions, as were Huck and Tom, and as all boys are, Wilhelm Meidling was not. He defied society and public opinion, even as Professor Brooks says Huck and Tom did. Here is the picture:

At Marget's it was like a funeral. She and Wilhelm sat together on the sofa, but said nothing, and not even holding hands. Both were steeped in gloom; ... she said, "I have been begging him to go, and come no more, and so save himself alive. This house is bewitched, and no inmate of it will escape the fire. But he will not go, and he will be lost with the rest."

Wilhelm said he would not go; if there was danger for her, his place was by her, and there he would remain. ...

37

And notice that, if in the end Tom's conscience drove him to testify in the courtroom, and so save Muff Potter, so do the consciences of Theodor and Seppi force them to give their testimony in the courtroom--

testimony that helped save Father Peter's life and the lives of Ursula and Marget. The balance is well-ordered. The Mark Twain who wrote The Mysterious Stranger might have had his temperament, his disposition, crushed by embittering experience, but the "post-mortem" reveals the same kindness and compassion "still in his corpse." ³⁸ His boys are boys, whether he created them in Vienna in 1898, or at Quarry Farm in 1872.

We have found in our glimpse into The Mysterious Stranger that it is based upon a philosophy older than the "despair period," that it contains no damnation of the human race other than that based upon the moral issues prevalent in earlier works, and that there is demonstrable in the tale itself a temperamental balance.

Now what does all this lead to? Is there a purpose to it all? If these three works, What Is Man? The Mysterious Stranger, and the Autobiography, are not "symbols of despair," why do they present with such frequency the foibles and unpleasant features of Man? We have had frequent hints at the reason. Consider the features of Mark Twain's philosophic system as the Old Man has outlined it. Man's threefold mechanism can be trained to perfection up to its limit. This training to higher ideals is Mark Twain's primary interest. But he is interested in the training--not of the upper classes, but of those masses of humanity which will never know the great masters. It is the masses he

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This is paraphrase of a statement made by Mark Twain in Christian Science (Works, XXV, 191): "The man born kind and compassionate can have that disposition crushed down out of sight by embittering experience; but if it were an organ, the post-mortem would find it in his corpse."

criticizes for allowing themselves to be deceived and denied, and he holds them examples to show that the leading spirits of all ages have sprung in affluent multitudes from the people. He teaches that people have to be led to bettering themselves, and that the duty of a government is to lead its people by setting traps for them--traps baited with initiatory impulses to higher ideals. But governments often fail in this; consequently the duty devolves upon public-spirited individuals. Yet, Mark Twain had learned from history that a Jesus, a Jack Cade, a Wat Tyler, or any reformer who came out in the open against established institutions and popular prejudice, not only was denounced by the institutions, but was crucified by the people controlled by the institutions. Consequently, the only safe way to improve mankind was to slip up on the blind side of established tradition and those whom he wished to reform. How could this be managed? We find the answer in The Mysterious Stranger. Theodore and Satan talk, and Satan offers hope--

Satan was accustomed to say that our race lived a life of continuous and uninterrupted self-deception. It duped itself from cradle to grave with shams and delusions which it mistook for realities, and thus made its entire life a sham. Of the score of fine qualities which it imagined it had and was vain of, it really possessed hardly one. It regarded itself as gold, and was only brass. One day when he was in this vein he mentioned a detail--the sense of humor. I cheered up then, and took issue. I said we possessed it.

'There spoke the race!' he said; 'always ready to claim what it hasn't got, and mistake its ounce of brass filings for a ton

of gold-dust. You have a mongrel perception of humor, nothing more; a multitude of you possess that. This multitude see the comic side of a thousand low-grade and trivial things--broad incongruities, mainly; grotesqueries, absurdities, evokers of the horse-laugh. The ten thousand high-grade comicalities which exist in the world are sealed from their dull vision. [Remember, he is still talking about the multitude]. Will a day come when the race will detect the funniness of these juvenilities and laugh at them--and by laughing at them destroy them? For your race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon--laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution--these can lift at a colossal humbug--push it a little--weaken it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand. You are always fussing and fighting with your other weapons. Do you ever use that one? No; you leave it lying rusting. As a race, do you ever use it at all? No, you lack sense and courage!' 39

It is my belief that Mark Twain, throughout his literary career, but progressively more as he grew older, continued to set traps for the people--traps in the form of books, stories, tales which would present the human race in the most ridiculous and despicable light, so that, seeing themselves, they might laugh. There is hardly a one of his stories that, with all its rare good humor, does not contain some deep, underlying moral principle. Because of this humor, he said, he had two chances to the ordinary teacher's one. If he could start the people to laughing at sham, the pretenses of religion and society, he would have made a great

step forward toward the removal of prejudice and artificiality, for people do not obey and worship what they laugh at. Laughter is salvation. He emphasized this fact about the time he was composing A Connecticut Yankee (1887) for in the Notebook he wrote:

By the absence of an irreverent press, Europe for a thousand years has existed merely for the advantage of half a dozen seventh-rate families called Monarchs, and some hundreds of riffraff sarcastically called Nobles. Our papers have one peculiarity--it is American--it exists nowhere else--their irreverence. May they never lose and never modify it. They are irreverent toward pretty much everything, but where they laugh one good King to death, they laugh a thousand cruel and infamous shams and superstitions into the grave, and the account is squared. Irreverence is the champion of liberty and its only sure defense.

40

Does not the philosophy of Mark Twain seem to point to this general conclusion? Is the "pessimistic" note throughout all his work anything more than an irreverent, iconoclastic spirit--a spirit with a definite purpose? Starting his career with a "thousand low-grade and trivial things," he worked steadily and progressively toward this heavy, bludgeoning humor--an absolute humor which does not merely tickle the ribs, but rocks the very soul. Mark Twain was the philosopher of humor, a practical philosopher who appealed, not to the intelligentsia through

aesthetic abstractions borrowed from the old world, but to the individual, average American through the means of his native, fresh, and unashamed humor.

As was stated at the beginning of this investigation, the purpose has not been to seek profundities in Mark Twain or to place him alongside the great philosophical masters. The primary aim has been to arrive at a fuller understanding of Mark Twain through a closer analysis of his philosophical opinions. We have seen in his works not merely a humorist, but a humorist with clearly defined purposes. We have found him, not simply a moral being, but a moral teacher with a pervasive didacticism throughout his work. We have observed that he was not a pessimist who had despaired of humankind, but that he was a philosopher who had observed mankind and, having discovered man's weakness, had outlined a system of training whereby man might reach his fullest development. His masculine positiveness, his skillful artistry, and his sincere humanitarianism deny overwhelmingly that he was frustrated, baffled, or desperate.

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BIOGRAPHY

Frank C. Flowers was born in Jackson, Louisiana, October 29, 1908. He received the customary elementary and secondary school training, and was given a certificate of graduation from the Ouachita Parish High School, Monroe, Louisiana, in 1926. He entered Louisiana College, Pineville, Louisiana, in the fall of the same year, and in 1930 he received the Bachelor of Arts degree in dramatic art. In the summer of 1930 he enrolled at Peabody College, Nashville, Tennessee, and began graduate study in Latin. He taught in Jackson Parish near Jonesboro for one year, then registered in Stanford University, where he took another A. B. degree, this time in Classical Literature. He returned to Louisiana College in 1932 as Professor of Latin and Greek, which position he held actively until 1938 and in absentia until 1941. He received the degree of Master of Arts in 1939 at Louisiana State University, and is now a candidate for the doctorate.

EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Frank C. Flowers

Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: Mark Twain's Theories of Morality

Approved:

Arlin Turner

Major Professor and Chairman

Charles W. Pittkin

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Joan Chaffin Miller
Henry B. Stebbins

W. J. Olive
Earl L. Bradsher

Date of Examination:

May 9, 1941